

Mayor Rick Dumas, Marathon Town Council, and Biigtigong Nishnaabeg Relationship Challenges and Information for the public

Chronology of Events and Documented Correspondence | January–October 2026

Purpose: To establish a factual, chronological account of the communications, meetings, and efforts involving Mayor Rick Dumas, the Town of Marathon, and Chief Duncan Michano of Biigtigong Nishnaabeg following comments made at a January 29, 2026, Marathon Council meeting.

The timeline distinguishes between documented actions, explanations provided by Mayor Dumas, and concerns expressed by Chief Michano and Biigtigong Council. This distinction is important because the parties disagree about the meaning and impact of the original comments.

Timeline of events

Jan. 26, 2026

- Marathon Council meeting — incident giving rise to concerns
- Comments made during a Marathon Council meeting became the subject of concerns from Biigtigong Nishnaabeg. Subsequent correspondence identifies the comments as involving political or racial colour.
- Mayor Dumas maintained that the comments referred to political affiliation and frustration with provincial representation. Chief Michano subsequently communicated that Biigtigong Council and community members considered the comments racially motivated.

Jan. 26, 2026

- Mayor Dumas issues a public apology on the statements made during the Public Budget Meeting.

Feb. 5, 2026

- Mayor Dumas requests direct conversation
- While travelling, Mayor Dumas emailed Chief Michano requesting a conversation that morning.
- This establishes an early documented attempt at direct communication.

Feb. 9, 2026

- Formal correspondence sent on behalf of Mayor and Council
- Town CAO Daryl Skworchinski emailed Chief Michano, indicating that Mayor Dumas was out of the country with limited technology access and that correspondence was being forwarded on behalf of the Mayor and Council.

Source: “FW: Town of Marathon Correspondence” — February 9, 2026

Apr. 14–15, 2026

- Mayor requests meeting to address January incident
- On April 14, Mayor Dumas contacted Chief Michano, Debi Bouchie and Town CAO Skworchinski proposing a lunch meeting in Biigtigong or Marathon to discuss the January 29 meeting and work toward resolution.
- On April 15, Chief Michano replied that he would get back to the Mayor shortly. Mayor Dumas acknowledged the response.

Source: “FW: Lunch meeting.”

Apr. 19–20, 2026

- Both leaders (Dumas and Michano) coordinate a meeting in Thunder Bay
- On April 19, Chief Michano suggested meeting while both leaders were in Thunder Bay. On April 20, Mayor Dumas proposed breakfast or coffee on Thursday morning, and Chief Michano agreed.
- Their correspondence documents a mutual effort to arrange an in-person discussion.

Apr. 23, 2026

- Mayor Dumas and Chief Michano meet at the Prince Arthur Hotel
- The two leaders met in Thunder Bay to discuss the January incident.
- The subsequent correspondence establishes that Mayor Dumas reiterated his position that the comment related to political colour. Chief Michano raised Biigtigong's concerns and later reported the discussion to his Council.

Source: Chief Michano's April 30 email and Mayor Dumas's May 3 response. The April 30 email confirms April 23 as the meeting date.

Apr. 30, 2026

- Chief Michano communicates Biigtigong Council's position
- Following discussion with Biigtigong Council, Chief Michano wrote to Mayor Dumas expressing disappointment that Marathon continued to characterize the comments as not racially motivated.
- Chief Michano stated that Biigtigong Council could not accept an apology that did not acknowledge racial motivation. He also expressed a desire to maintain open dialogue.

May 3, 2026

- Mayor Dumas responds to Chief Michano
- Mayor Dumas reiterated his understanding that the comments concerned political affiliation, not race.
- He stated that an apology could be offered for causing the situation but that he could not ask the individual involved to acknowledge a racial intention that the Mayor did not believe existed.
- Mayor Dumas expressed regret that the matter remained unresolved and indicated his desire for a positive outcome and continued relationship.

May 14, 2026

- Mayor seeks further discussion
- Mayor Dumas contacted Chief Michano to request a meeting about resolving the January 29 matter and discussing issues involving their shared port board.

May 27–28, 2026

- Port meeting and renewed invitation
- On May 28, Mayor Dumas reported that a port meeting had taken place the previous day and that operations were proceeding while recruitment of a port manager continued.
- He again asked Chief Michano how the two Councils could come together to address the unresolved matter and proposed lunch the following week.

Source: “FW: Relationship” — May 28 email.

June 24, 2026

- Mayor proposes joint Council meeting
- Mayor Dumas requested an opportunity for the two Councils to meet as part of their quarterly discussions and address the January incident.
- In the same email, he requested replacement Biigtigong flags for the flagpole at Marathon Town Hall, explaining that the previous flag had become tattered and was removed.

Source: “FW: Meeting” — June 24 email.

Sept. 29, 2026

- Chief Michano outlines continued concerns
- In a written response to a recent letter from Mayor Dumas, Chief Michano disputed the characterization of the number and substance of their discussions.
- He maintained that responsibility for resolving the matter rested with Marathon's Mayor and Council. He also raised concerns regarding human resources issues within Marathon's senior management.
- Chief Michano confirmed that Marathon Mayor and Council had not been invited to Biigtigong's September 30 Truth and Reconciliation gathering, citing concerns about the approaching municipal election.

Source: “FW: Letter” — September 29 email.

Sept. 30, 2026

- Mayor informs Marathon Council
- Mayor Dumas forwarded Chief Michano's correspondence to members of Marathon Council and the CAO.
- He indicated that he had communicated with Chief Michano on additional occasions beyond their April meeting and expressed disappointment about not being invited to the Truth and Reconciliation gathering, which he had intended to attend.

Source: “FW: Letter” — September 30 forwarding email.

October 14, 2026

- Biigtigong Nishnaabeg (BN) Chief and Council released a public statement on social media addressing what they described as misleading statements by Mayor Rick Dumas and at least one member of Marathon Town Council regarding the relationship between the two Councils.
- The statement asserted that the relationship between Biigtigong Nishnaabeg Council and Marathon Council had not been repaired and that no meetings or discussions were currently taking place between the Councils.
- Biigtigong leadership further stated that Marathon Council was aware of its expectations regarding racism concerns within Town operations and that those concerns must be addressed before trust and a relationship could be rebuilt.

Source: “BN Social Media Public Statement” – October 14, 2026 .

Oct. 14, 2026

- Correspondence assembled for review
- Town CAO Skworchinski circulated the February 9 correspondence to Council, referencing a September 29 copy and recommending that documentary records be shared to substantiate the Town's account.
- Additional historical emails were forwarded for review on October 14.

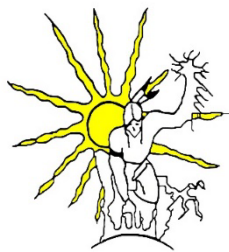
Source: “FW: Town of Marathon Correspondence” and forwarded email records.

Conclusion and commitment from Marathon Town Council, Mayor Rick Dumas, and Town of Marathon.

Mayor Rick Dumas and Marathon Town Council remain open and willing and stand ready to meet with the leadership of Biigtigong Nishnaabeg to engage in meaningful, respectful dialogue and work together toward a path of reconciliation.

We recognize that rebuilding relationships takes time, understanding, and a genuine commitment from all involved. Our hope remains to move forward together, address outstanding concerns, and build a lasting relationship founded on mutual respect, trust, understanding, and reciprocity.

The door remains open, and our commitment to meaningful dialogue and a positive relationship between our communities remains steadfast.



BIIGTIGONG
NISHNAABEG

78 Pic River Rd
Biigtigong Nishnaabeg
P0T 1R0

After a lot of careful deliberation, consideration and dialogue, Biigtigong Nishnaabeg Chief and Council wish to make the following statement:

On the evening of Thursday Jan 29th, we were made aware of a short video clip making it's rounds through social media of a recent Marathon Town council meeting. In the clip there was a discussion about funding opportunities related to water infrastructure, including upgrades and reserves. A question was asked, by a Councillor, about how often the funding opportunities came around. The Mayor responded, *"They come out all the time"*. A senior town staff member can then be heard, off camera, commenting, *"Yeah, we're just the wrong color"*. Given the context of the conversation, which was around water and sewage systems, I along with Biigtigong Council, BN staff and people of Biigtigong believe that the rude, bigoted remark was made because Biigtigong had been successful in obtaining funding for the complete replacement of our water system which was outdated and inadequate and beyond capacity. Biigtigong Nishnaabeg did not receive that funding based on skin color. It was awarded because of a concerted and skilled campaign and application process by both Biigtigong political leaders and administrative staff working together for the betterment of the community. Biigtigong Nishnaabeg must compete with 600 other First Nations across Canada for any funding we get. I would like to remind the Mayor and Marathon Council and staff and the residents of Marathon, about the numerous permanent boil water advisories in First Nation communities across Canada because of a lack of funding. I am not aware of any Municipalities that are under permanent boil water advisories. If there are, please remind me.

BIIGTIGONG NISHNAABEG

To add to the trauma, anger and hurt experienced by all Biigtigong members, when that video clip hit social media, Mayor Dumas issued a statement suggesting that the remark referred to political color rather than skin color. Biigtigong members were enraged as were other First Nation people. Instead of holding the person(s) accountable for their actions/comments, there appears to be an attempt to support the individual(s) by providing an escape route.

Given, what appears to be a corporate culture in the Marathon Administrative section, and possibly the political section, which does not appear to be supportive of, and may even be biased towards, First Nations aspirations, I cannot see how we can work together when that trust has now disappeared. The general feeling is that Biigtigong is being used. Biigtigong has no choice but to suspend any support or funding for projects that were proposed until such a time that there is a reset in the relationship.

One of the things that Biigtigong Nishnaabeg would consider a step in the right direction is for the township to create an additional councillor position to be filled by a FN person from Biigtigong who lives in Marathon.

Additionally, the Township of Marathon must hold the person who made those remarks, as well as their supervisor, accountable for their actions and words. Bigotry has no place in the workplace and needs to be rooted out. Biigtigong would like to know what the township intends to do in that regard.

I would also like to remind the Mayor and Council of the numerous Studies and Royal Commissions that they can fall back on and implement:

- 1- The Residential School Inquiry. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: 94 calls to action
- 2- MMIWG. Missing and Murdered Women and Girls. 231 calls for justice.
- 3- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. 440 recommendations.

The implementation of these recommendations by all levels of government and organizations would go a long way towards true reconciliation as would the rooting out of bigotry, racism, misogyny, and xenophobia from the workplace.

In recent years, Biigtigong Nishnaabeg have reached out to see how we could partner in helping each other with common issues and have also suggested partnerships with First Nations and Municipalities around the North Superior Region. I cannot see how this can now move forward given the mistrust that now exists.

Chief Duncan Michano on behalf of the council and people of Biigtigong Nishnaabeg.

Duncan M. Michano

BIIGTIGONG NISHNAABEG



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OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

SENT VIA EMAIL: chiefpicriver@picriver.com

February 9, 2026

Chief Duncan Michano
Biigtigong Nishnaabeg
78 Pic River Road
P.O. Box 193
Heron Bay, ON P0T 2E0

Dear Chief Michano and Council,

The Town of Marathon writes to acknowledge the concerns raised by Biigtigong Nishnaabeg Chief and Council regarding a video clip circulating on social media from a Town of Marathon Council meeting held on Thursday, January 29, 2026, and follow-up correspondence from Chief Michano dated February 5, 2026.

The Town of Marathon does not tolerate bias, discrimination, or racism in any form. We sincerely apologize for any harm or upset caused by the comment, regardless of intent. We recognize that the comment could reasonably be perceived as offensive and understand how such remarks are deeply hurtful, particularly in light of the historical and ongoing impacts of racism experienced by Indigenous communities.

The Town of Marathon values and respects its relationship with Biigtigong Nishnaabeg and remains committed to reconciliation, mutual respect, and collaboration. In June 2010, Biigtigong Nishnaabeg and the Town of Marathon signed the Maamwinaadmaading Accord that contained eight (8) key tenets that the communities would mutually work together on moving forward. Since 2010, there are a number of excellent examples that demonstrate this commitment to working together for joint prosperity and include: Nawiinginokima Forest Management Corporation, Peninsula Harbour Port Authority joint venture, Pebble Beach signage indigenous language translation project, Active Living Centre project development, Marathon Visitor Information Centre land and building sale, solid waste management agreement, emergency services and fire department support, support of Biigtigong Nishnaabeg land claim, and regular joint Council to Council meetings.

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Mayor and Council are committed to continued relationship building to support shared priorities and to ensure a constructive path forward that benefits current and future generations. The Town believes this situation reflects a misunderstanding, but one that has the potential to cause division if left unaddressed. We do not want that outcome. Addressing concerns directly, respectfully, and in good faith is essential to rebuilding trust and the strong relationship between our communities – we are neighbours.

In the spirit of respectful dialogue and reconciliation, Council and I would like to meet with Biigtigong Nishnaabeg Chief and Council in the near term to discuss these matters further, work together on the way forward, and reconfirm the principles of the Maamwinaadmaading Accord.

Respectfully,

THE TOWN OF MARATHON



Rick Dumas
Mayor
(on behalf of Town Council)

pc: Marathon Town Council
Daryl Skworchinski, CAO/Clerk



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OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

File No. 3-75

September 29, 2026

National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

Dear Chief Duncan Michano and Members of Biigtigong Nishnaabeg Council,

I am writing in the spirit of Marathon Town Council's commitment to Truth and Reconciliation.

My relationship with Biigtigong Nishnaabeg goes back to 2006, when then-Chief Roy Michano and I met. We believed that our communities' relationship needed to be built on trust, respect, communication, and a commitment to working together. In 2010, Chief Roy Michano and I signed the Friendship Treaty. It continues to reflect our commitment to a strong relationship based on mutual trust and respect.

Over the years, our communities have faced challenges and even conflicts. We have also accomplished a great deal together. The strength of our relationship has been in our ability to communicate openly and honestly with one another.

Words spoken at the January 29 Marathon Town Council meeting, however misinterpreted, were nonetheless hurtful, and we are profoundly sorry. We are aware that those words were heard in the context of past and ongoing incidents of racism and trauma.

Since then, I have had many conversations with Chief Duncan Michano, in person, by text, and by email, expressing our desire to meet to restore and deepen our commitment. Our Councillors agreed to not engage in this conflict on social media. It was a difficult choice, but it felt more respectful to engage directly with Chief Michano and the Biigtigong Nishnaabeg Council.

I am reaching out again, hoping for a meeting between Biigtigong Nishnaabeg Council and Marathon Town Council. We want to observe any cultural protocols that are important to you as part of that meeting. Our intention is to restore and build on our communities' relationship by practicing truth and reconciliation.

Sincerely,

THE TOWN OF MARATHON



Rick Dumas
On behalf of Marathon Town Council



respect. works here.

From: Duncan Michano <chiefpicriver@picriver.com>

Date: September 29, 2026 at 10:58:26 PM EDT

To: Rick Dumas <mayor@marathon.ca>

Cc: Duncan Michano <chiefpicriver@picriver.com>, Council <council@picriver.com>

Subject: Letter

Rick.

In response to your recent letter, attached, there are a few points I would like to make:

1 - You have **not had many conversations** with me about the Jan Marathon council comment issue. We had **one meeting** in the Prince Arthur Hotel around April 20, 26. In that meeting I laid out Biigtigongs concerns. You doubled down on insisting it was only a political color comment. None of our people believe that and many people in Marathon don't believe that either.

2 – Granted there were a few texts exchanged and a few emails which I tried to ignore, but those were from you requesting meetings to resolve the issue. Rick. This is not an issue that Biigtigong needs to resolve. This is an issue that the Mayor and Marathon Council need to resolve.

Until the HR issues that exist within Marathons senior managers are resolved there is no way that Biigtigong can work with Marathon again. If you don't see that there is an issue within the senior management then I think someone may be turning a blind eye.

3 – In regards to the Truth and Reconciliation gathering tomorrow Marathon Mayor and Council were not invited. With the impending Municipal election, we do not want to use this important event to give anyone political points for attending.

4 – Finally, I would like to say that Marathon Mayor and Council need to have a hard look internally. That's where the problem exists.

Miigwetch,

Duncan Michano, Chief Biigtigong Nishnaabeg

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