

Conversation notes from the Town Hall Meeting on Lodge Consolidation  
Held in Vancouver, British Columbia, July 18<sup>th</sup> 2012

Organized by W. Bro Tristan Baird  
And  
W. Bro Wes Regan

Note taking and moderating of the meeting undertaken by W. Bro Regan

## Conversation Notes:

On July 18<sup>th</sup> 2012 Brethren from several Lodges throughout British Columbia's Lower Mainland met at the Masonic Centre on 8<sup>th</sup> avenue to engage in a discussion, town hall style, regarding the topic of Lodge Consolidation. Three Current and a number of past DDGMs, several current Worshipful Masters and a host of newer and younger members along with seasoned veterans of the Fraternity were in attendance.

The meeting was organized by W. Bro Tristan Baird and W. Bro Wesley Regan; both being current Worshipful Masters of Vancouver Lodge # 68 and Mt. Hermon Lodge #7 respectively.

The guest panel consisted of:

**RW Bro. Philip Durell**, current Grand Senior Warden GLBCY, past DDGM for District 13 and past Master of Maple Leaf Lodge, which consolidated with Park Lodge in 2004. RW Bro Durell was one of the Brethren most engaged in the preliminary planning and transition work leading up to and during consolidation of the two Lodges.

**RW Bro. Ken Davies**, Past Grand Director of Ceremonies and Past Master of Maple Leaf Lodge and Maple Leaf Park Lodge. RW Bro Davies was WM during the consolidation transition of the two Lodges.

**RW Bro. Jim Bennie**, current Secretary for Lodge Southern Cross and Chair of the Grand Lodge Committee on Ritual. RW Bro Bennie has experience firsthand concerning Lodge Consolidation and was in attendance for both this reason and because his is one of the most respected opinions on matters of ritual in the Grand Jurisdiction.

**W Bro. Tristan Baird**, current WM of Vancouver #68, W.Bro Baird has conducted research on Lodge attrition rates in British Columbia as well as consolidation and amalgamation of Lodges both here and in other Grand Jurisdictions. He was also one of the key organizers for the event.

The town hall meeting was moderated and hosted by **W Bro. Wes Regan**, current Worshipful Master of Mt. Hermon #7. W. Bro Regan has served District 13 twice as District Education Officer and is the Committee Chair for Grand Masonic Day and sits on the Grand Lodge Leadership Committee. W. Bro Regan worked closely with W. Bro Baird to organize the event.

Moderator- I want to thank everyone for coming today, it's a beautiful day outside and I know there are plenty of other things that we could be doing with our time. The fact that so many of you showed up tonight demonstrates just how important or relevant this topic has become in our region and I'm looking forward to having a very good discussion on this issue of Lodge Consolidation. I want to start by saying this is not an advertisement for consolidation, this is not meant to sway an opinion one way or the other. This is intended to be a forum where we can openly and comfortably talk about an issue that has been difficult in the past for some to broach as it can be complex and at times fraught with emotional or political baggage so to speak. I want to start by asking our Panel why they agreed to be here tonight, what they think is most important to consider when the topic of Lodge Consolidation is discussed today?

Tristan Baird- The best way for the Craft to move forward and spur membership and growth is to take the underutilized Lodges we have today and consolidate them. That's about all I have to say about it right now.

Ken Davies- In Maple Leaf Park I was master before and during consolidation, lots of people said it wouldn't work, we would have a hostile environment, but we had two Lodges coming together as EQUALS we didn't feel that it was a takeover, we each had something to contribute to that marriage of the two Lodges. I don't recall a cross word from a Brother when it came together, it seemed to be a seamless coming together of the two Lodges. If there ever was a model for consolidation I would hope it would be ours

Philip Durell- I am not representing Grand Lodge tonight. I think that consolidation in certain cases is desirable, but a successful consolidation requires a long courtship. It is also essential that the Brethren from both Lodges feel there is a considerable amount of the old Lodge in the newly consolidated Lodge. In the case of Maple Leaf – Park a lot of the other things came from both Lodges, a lot of things we did even before considering consolidation, we would jointly confer degrees at either Lodge hall with members from both Lodges. One of our senior members had said “over my dead body” but we didn't try to push anything through, eventually a committee was put together with Brethren from each side, working together for a long time. We produced draft bylaws, and guidelines, wrote all of that out so there was a draft plan, we had three town hall meetings with all of the Brethren from both Lodges attend, and we hashed all of it out. Expect resistance, someone isn't going to like it, but if you look 10 years down the road and ask yourself, where is my Lodge going to be in 10 years...? We looked ahead and decided that consolidation was the best option.

A key part is elements of both Lodges staying in the new, what fails is when a big Lodge takes over a small Lodge but says “we're not going to change” Brethren from each old Lodge have to get value out of it, if they feel that it's being pushed down their throats, they just won't consolidate. Merging more than 2 Lodges is also

difficult. Theme nights or other certain traditions are important to hold on to as well.

Don- From what I understand Park owned the Land but what did maple leaf do regarding the building and property?

Philip- the Park Lodge Building Association didn't change one bit

Ken- that's exactly correct, we do our best to support all the Lodges that are resident of that building. We have a fairly new tenant now, Rogers wireless, and with that tenant supporting all the tenants.

Philip- Rogers cell tower on top is a decent source of revenue

David M- if you're doing an amalgamation is there a protocol to integrate the chairs? Is there a protocol as to how you would do this if there are two different Lodges?

Philip- in the case of MLP it was fairly easy as we needed young officers (Park Lodge) as Park Lodge was mostly older members and Past Masters (and Maple Leaf had a good core of young members) I imagine that if you had a full slate of officers and no past master it may be more difficult.

Ken Davies- we do have a nice meld of the history of both Lodges involved, and it wasn't necessarily on purpose.

Philip- all the past DDGMs got along very well.

Ken- Maple Leaf and Park, regarding ritual we decided we would go with the Black Book

Paul F- whenever there's a conflict, it's my experience that a lot of people have a lot of entrenched opinions, but as soon as you ask "why do you do it this way" the room goes silent. So when we talk about justifying ritual it should always come down to why and not how. For me the biggest thing though is shared vision, even as a benchmark to focus on when you merge. I think having a shared vision is a key element or ingredient, one of them is we are triplicating the administration that we need for Lodges, some are desperate for members, some are rushed through the chairs, some are made permanent members of Grand Lodge and a lot of us see this and are looking at ways to fix this and amalgamation looks like one of the best ways. The onus on visiting is completely ridiculous for anyone of my generation with a fulltime job or family, and many of these Lodges are on life support, so we need to look to the drivers for amalgamation. The questions need to be asked months in advance.

Moderator- is it better for the very weak lodges just to fold rather than consolidate with a stronger Lodge?

Philip- One of the things a Lodge can do to help the Brethren is to assist in affiliation, before the Lodge folds, be proactive. I have no fundamental problem with that.

Bruce- how long is a real long courtship? Getting back to your original comment. "We started on the road as early as two and a half years" There was a letter written by [REDACTED] saying, let's do this? (meaning Consolidation)

Philip- there was a good 2 years of courtship and at least 2 years after that of going through the process itself

Bruce- so it sounds like there was a whole lot of buy in

Jim Bennie (who arrived late and did not get an opening comment)- that is the only way it ever works

Ziv- what about the night of the week

Philip- we were lucky! We both met on Monday so we didn't face that one

Tristan- I want to go back to that question about turning in charters for a moment, I think it's taking the easy way out. It's dog work, sure to consolidate is tough but King Solomon's temples was destroyed and rebuilt again twice. We're Masons. We do the hard work.

Paul – On the affiliation issue we held a meeting and we decided to cover every member's affiliation fees for the district and encouraged them to affiliate, we had a final dinner, it was a decision we made because it made sense.

Philip- it is far preferable to pay someone's affiliation while the Lodge is still in existence rather than pay out a lump sum afterwards that they might not use for affiliation.

Trevor - I want to ask ken about the building society question brought up earlier, did everyone become members of the building society?

Ken- it's pretty much an even match

Terry- Something you said Paul about things that are detrimental to the Craft, I think that what we need to be careful about is that we remember the importance of the whole fraternity, and not just our Lodges. One thing that I was interested in was in acacia Lodge the WM Dalbir Daliwal had asked everyone to stand up and share

their opinion about consolidation in a recent meeting, I thought that was a good idea.

Mike H- we have no depth on the sidelines, amalgamation can bring us depth in the chairs, depth on the sidelines. That's one of the best things to consider in Amalgamation. So we can get to a point where we don't have to recycle chairs, recycle officers.

Jim Bennie- this is the thing, we have guys leaving, guys dying, and every year we have guys going through the chairs and Lodges either have to recycle past masters through chairs or attract new members to replace the ones who leave

Philip- I've seen it in other cases where a Lodge was struggling and it was revived and then it seems fine for 5 years and then it falls apart again, and this I've seen a few times. This is why Grand Lodge Officers keep on emphasizing the importance of Long Range Plans. Just because a Lodge has money doesn't mean they have people resources, a lodge with little money but good people resources brings value to a consolidation with a Lodge that might have money but doesn't have the people

Tristan- when you have a lot of brethren that are participating you have a merit based system and not just throwing guys into the role, when you have active participation and you have 40-50 guys you get the best ritual work

Sam A- We called this meeting and look how many people showed up! This isn't a Lodge meeting. Look how many people here, there must be something right about what we're doing here. So let's do something about it. What is the first step that we have to do, how do we get this going? Let's start this process tonight.

Moderator (in response to Sam A)- I believe from the quality of discussion we're having here that the process has already begun tonight. It's my personal opinion as a member of District #13 that we take these thoughts and ideas back to the District Council and discuss it there in more detail.

Troy- I come from a district in North Vancouver, and we have 7 Lodges, only 3 or 4 of which will survive. It's important to emphasize what Tristan said, if we don't have the depth so that those who can do the work aren't burnt out, if they can't make a meeting and the Lodge is in the lurch because they can't make it, that's not good. If the Lodges get to the point where the quality isn't good, and they can't attract guys to take the chairs then they're already done. The decision last year to lower affiliation fees just extends the problem in my opinion. What I think must happen is the charters that are weak need to move (fold or consolidate) or consider moving sooner and not later. Grand Lodge can't solve this, it has to be done at the grassroots level, the Lodges have to do that.

Jim Bennie- In one Lodge that I was in it took about 5 years to accept that we couldn't carry on the way that we were. Our past masters got burnt out and we

ended up having a series of meetings, and there were all these details, we have to have this bank account this way, and ritual has to be this way but eventually it got to the point where we just sat down and were at that point where it needed to be done. The DDGM sat us all down, Grand Lodge didn't tell him to, he just sat us down and said this is what we're doing.

Bruce- In Vancouver 68 we found every name since 1995 and we tracked them down to see where they were, 10% simply disappeared, 30% didn't make it 3 years. It didn't "sit well" or they got busy or whatever, it lost its intrigue. 30% within 7 years transferred, had kids, moved because of work. 30% stayed. Tracking that through other Lodges that seems to be a pretty solid number. 30% will be with you for the long haul. Most Lodges bring in about 4 and 8 a year, we still have not matched the number of Brothers who have died, even though we've been bringing in 4-8 a year but since I've joined we've shrunk by half, even if we continue to bring in 4-8 and maintain at 30% we're still shrinking.

Philip- your statistics are pretty good, I saw recent numbers from another Grand Lodge report that said MM after being raised in North America, 2 out of 10 are still active in their Lodges after 5 years.

Tristan- a question keeps on coming up in my research and it's the quality - quantity issues. We have the quantity of men, we have enough, we just have too many bloody Lodges!

Terry- I want to agree with Philip Durell, amalgamation of Lodges for two is possible but three is difficult. I want to get back to Acacia though and Brother Daliwal's question. The most interesting question that came up in that was from someone who had military experience and he brought up the name thing, where the new brigade chose a new name

Philip- yes that's where elements of the old Lodge remaining in the new Lodge are key once again

Paul- Someone mentioned the Widows earlier, our answer was we met up with them and introduced them to the Masonic Service Guild and gave them (the Service Guild) money to offset the cost. On the topic of rebuilding though and replacement rate for our numbers, the more people we put through the more difficult it is to educate them and the more strain it puts on the members of the Lodge.

Edward- Touching on what Paul just said and those numbers that Bruce brought up, in MLP the last 7 we have brought in, for each one I've seen them being pushed way too hard. We have newly raised brethren being pushed into chairs, they're going to school, full time job etc. And a lot of young guys in identical situations and we're pushing them and pushing them and I can see this being a negative thing for these men coming in, the pressure. We're almost close to having a guy who just finished

back surgery pushed into a chair, and I don't think it's good to have Freemasonry associated with Pushing.

David- "What have you done lately" history is important but what's even more important is what are you doing now. We need to put the history and whining and sniveling aside and look ahead, commit and get the job done.

Sam- Every bro who is here today is here of his own free will and accord. We should start a new Lodge right here today with the members that are in attendance.

Khuram- I think we should look at how many meetings we have in a year, 18 is too many. If we had fewer meetings but they were of better quality it would be a back to basics move that would really help.

Philip- Young people with families and careers cannot attend 16 – 18 meetings with their Lodge, Board of general purposes, go to installations and go to every DDGM visit etc. I agree. My opinion is they don't have to. That might not be what you are told in your Lodge, but what about sending one of your Wardens instead? The other thing, I totally agree why have 18 meetings in a year? Why? Why do we need 18 of which 10 are business meetings where we struggle to have a piece of education and business expends the time available? I do think it's advantages to plan to have less meetings. I don't think you even need one business meeting per month, you can always, if you need to, you can have an emergent meeting whenever you like. I honestly have a difficult time with having that many meetings. BUT changing the number of meetings, halving it, won't change anything if you don't have a plan. You need a plan, if you just amalgamate without a plan you won't have sustainability.

Jim- You have to ask where do we go from here? You can't just leave it in the hands of the WM

Doug- I don't fully disagree with Bro Tang (who spoke earlier) but when I first joined freemasonry I noticed that we wanted to get the brethren involved right away. When you hold an office it gives you a reason to go to Lodge. We used to ballot for officers roles. There's a good reason to keep a brother active, give them a purpose, that every meeting they come to they'll have a duty and fellowship.

Jim- I think the difference is whether a guy feels obligated, or pressured

Tristan- 20 to 25 years ago we had the privilege of having 60-80 guys there every night and if you wanted to be an officer you had to prove yourself.

Dustin- Pardon the naivety of this question but why is this an issue now, today, when Masons have been dying and moving to different cities and have had families and careers for hundreds of years?



Philip- a number of things have changed, I don't think the numbers we have now are necessarily a bad number. What happened was after both World Wars, when the men came back from fighting, Freemasonry became a vehicle for camaraderie so we had these two huge expansions and then we had Lodges with 200 300 members and people who weren't getting a chance to be officers were starting their own Lodges. Because of the tradition we feel, now that we're at a more "normal" number and we're competing with so many other activities in secular society, other forms of entertainment, we still want to hold on to our Lodges because of the Tradition. I also think that out of the 20 -25 years we've actually been struggling we've been going for quantity not quality, we should be excited to come to Lodge. Fellowship should be foremost, not just having something to do, but new brethren don't have that same fellowship. I want to feel excited to go to Lodge, and the new guys deserve that too. I want to see a really entertaining speaker or really good ritual work or there's an interesting topic that I want to listen too...discussion. It starts with quality, quality of the men we bring in and of the programs we create. You cannot plan 18 great Lodge meetings in one year, unless you have tremendous amount of resources in your Lodge.

Khuram- With fewer meetings you can create truly special events. I don't have enough time in my life to go to mediocre meetings.

George- How many Lodges do we have and how many have amalgamated? Don't be afraid of it, it can work. The guys that say otherwise, don't know what you know, that it can be done. And we have Lodges that have been together a long time after consolidation.

Trevor- (gave a handful out of 195 we have 147) I'd say there have been no more than 25 but I don't have an exact number

Tristan- (Pulls out documentation) about 60 Lodges have consolidated, so there are about 30 consolidated Lodges today according to this (a file from the Grand Lodge website)

Sonny- This thing about pressure. Where guys get pressured, some guys can handle it and some can't, well they quite coming because they can't just enjoy themselves. We don't accept "no" when they say it.

John- Is there any idea how many consolidations have failed? How many Lodges considered it and then failed, because they had no set plan? Is there a vehicle whereby Lodges can approach "experts" for guidance in that process?

Philip- we (Grand Lodge) could possibly develop a committee to help Lodges here based on what we're seeing today.

Sean C- I think that what RW Bro Durell says about consolidation taking time is right but something we might be able to do, some of the brethren really know their

lectures, if we know those guys who really knew the work and we could get in touch with them that would help for the Lodges that need help.

Philip- (in response) the reason why the Lodges in Europe can do so well with so few meetings is that they use their Lodges of Instruction. I feel the most important person in any degree is the candidate, forcing the SW to do a lecture even though he is unprepared may not be the best use of that SW's time, and that's one of the reason why Maple Leaf and Park did joint degrees leading up to consolidation. There are a number of things we could do to assist with the time element for younger officers in particular, you could have a district degree team, which may be anathema though (in regards to your own Lodge knowing the work and doing it well- mod). However, we have a JW who when he was appointed I was concerned because his English, which was a second language, wasn't so good. Well the EA degree comes along and he was word perfect, absolutely word perfect.

Moderator note- If a district degree team had been utilized for that degree, the member of that Lodge who spoke English as a second Language, would not have had the chance to surprise and impress so many of his Brethren, what a great moment that must have been!

Erik- I've heard that in some jurisdictions that if a Lodge becomes a certain size it has to split off and if it becomes too small it has to fold or consolidate, are you familiar with this? (panel)

Tristan- There's something called Dunbar's number, the number of people you can keep in touch with in a network. It can't actually get too big. Roman Legions worked because of this.

Philip- Lodges in the UK aren't that Large and they don't meet often but once again they have Lodges of Instruction to support their members.

Alan- I was DDGM after Maple Leaf and Park had amalgamated and I had said at the end of the year, just how well they had done, and how hard they had worked at it. You have to work at it. But Maple Leaf and Park have really worked at making it work. Fellowship is key, we have to know each other. We have to have some fun. Board of Installed Master's I'm going to do it for another Lodge, not everyone can do these jobs, but if you can do it, it helps everyone. I would like to thank Wes and Tristan for organizing this, good job. (Moderator note- Thanks Alan!)

Mike- Grand Lodge can kind of be a facilitator for the "finding good brethren" to help out the Lodges and grand lodge can get in touch with a secretary or master to assist.

Philip- yes, similar to a speakers bureau perhaps, we might be able to have a ritual bureau. Usually it happens at the District level though.

Doug- Should the WM earn the right to become WM, finding someone to do those lectures is important, it's important for your officers who are going to climb those chairs to do those lectures and all of them have really deserved the right to sit in the East. When I was secretary, I used to insist that the WM did the Letter G or he wouldn't get his past master's jewel! (room laughter)

### **Panel's Closing Statements**

**Philip-** the one thing we need to do in every aspect is we need to focus on quality, quality is the essence. The way you go about it needs to incorporate quality, both partners need something that is worthwhile for both of them. What value is being brought to the table. The quality of the brethren that we allow into freemasonry is important, let them know what the level of commitment is, the quality of planning, the quality of meetings, in California they have Wardens tests...as an example, where they have to be of a certain quality. You young guys, you're the ones who have to carry Freemasonry into the future, so your ideas matter. So I'm really happy to see so many of you here.

**Ken-** I joined the craft because I wanted to spend some quality time with better people. You guys reminded me of that this evening, I heard so many constructive comments and questions I think that the future of Freemasonry is positive. You can make it a positive future, I share Philips thanks to Tristan and Wes for putting this together and to all who candidly shared your thoughts and ideas.

**Jim-** You have to look at what Philip was saying about quality Lodges, and then look at your Lodges and ask, is this doable? Look at the situation you're in now, can you fix the problems, if you can't fix them, if you don't know how to, then you have to look at your other options. A Lodge can't survive on history, your lodge shouldn't be going on for the sake of history, in a couple of instances where Lodges were struggling they came up with a plan, and in some ways amalgamation is a plan, but you have to look at you options. It would be beneficial if Grand Lodge could offer some assistance or guidance. If you're a young guy in a Lodge don't be afraid to raise the issue. Lodges in District 13 have already begun looking at this, if you can make it work go for it, if everyone's willing to try.

**Tristan-** There's a quote that's been rattling in my mind by Jack Kennedy, who said "we choose to go to the moon, not because it is easy, but because it is hard" Consolidation is hard work, it's harder than throwing in the towel, but in the end of the day consolidation is going to lead to a stronger Craft, not a stronger Lodge, but a stronger Craft. We'll have men like you building that temple, it's hard work but it will pay off.

**Moderator-** thank you again Brethren for coming this evening, notes will be available on the Grand Lodge website soon.

## **Constitution and Bylaw considerations regard Consolidation**

Two or more Lodges can consolidate

When voting on consolidation you must have  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the members present and 7 votes against can kill the motion

You must provide no less than two consecutive monthly notices to inform your Lodge members

A consolidated Lodge may bear the name and number of one of the Lodges comprising it, in which case it may retain the Warrant and Seal of that Lodge or it may take a new name and number or it may take a new name and keep the number or one such lodges, giving up seals and warrants of the prior and receiving new ones.

### **Closing note:**

If considering consolidating (aka amalgamating) with another Lodge a thoughtful, deliberate and transparent process that respects the concerns and traditions of both parties is preferable to a hurried or lopsided process in which some Brethren feel particularly raw about the process and its outcomes. With this in mind we know that often it is just impossible to please everyone. From the discussion we've captured we've seen that compromises may have to be made at times, but an inclusive process that involves the Brethren on both sides and recognizes the value of what each brings can result in a harmonious combining of the two.

Consolidation it is not a panacea for weak Lodges and can result in disharmony if not managed well. We hope this town hall meeting and the conversation notes captured shed light on some of the issues, concerns and potential that consolidation brings, and along with the tools and resources we have posted on the Grand Lodge website we hope they offer you some useful things to consider should you and the Brethren of your Lodge be considering this option. Please visit the GLBCY website at this address for more information:

[http://www.freemasonry.bcy.ca/events/vmc\\_townhall2012/index.html](http://www.freemasonry.bcy.ca/events/vmc_townhall2012/index.html)

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