

It's official: Election Code bill will be up to next council

OHSWEKEN — A push to have some type of elections code reform package on the books in time for next month's general election was officially laid to rest during a special meeting of Six Nations council last Thursday.

Council voted 5-4 to delay further action on the issue and leave it up to the next elected council to deal with. Chief Wellington Staats cast the final and deciding vote, breaking a 4-4 tie.

"My concern was that what they were proposing to present was a document that wasn't finished," said Staats. "We put out drafts but that committee hadn't put out something to say, 'Here's the finished document, now what do you think?'"

Staats was also concerned that some technical elements contained in the current election code were not carried over into the proposed code; for example, the powers and duties of the chief.

Staats said the drive on behalf of some of the election code committee members to get a referendum out before the public on the Nov. 17 election day just wasn't realistic. "How could people vote on something they've never seen before?" he asked.

He also objected to the whole format of multiple selections on key elements of the 30-page document, which the committee had been advocating. The committee had been pursuing the idea that voters be given the opportunity to pick and choose between some of the more contentious items on the proposed code, like whether council's term of office should be three years or two, whether an intermission would be required after a councillor served two consecutive terms, and whether candidates for council needed a Gr. 12 education to be eligible.

This difference of opinion underscores the chasm that had developed between the three councillors who had

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served on the elections committee over the past year — Chaired by Barbara Harris, along with Dave General and Roger Jonathan — who had participated in four public meetings in consultation with an ad hoc group of community members, and Chief Staats and the remainder of council members who had limited contact with the process.

Both General and Jonathan were philosophical now that the project they had tried to shepard over the last year has been relegated to the back shelves, at least for now.

"I guess the only troubling thing that came out of that meeting on Thursday was the chief's definition of consultation," said General. "From his point of view, consultation would have been putting this to the community, having them read it, and then getting a yes or no answer to it.

"As I told the chief, I have tremendous difficulty with that, especially when we as a First Nation are fighting for the right to be included in meaningful dialogue and meaningful input on matters with the federal government, or the provincial government on issues we have with them," General said. "Please tell me that's not going to be a yes or no interaction. We have to have the same standard. But there will be other days."

Jonathan said it had become clear to him for some time that the present council had no intention of passing anything as far as an overhauled elections code was concerned. "I wish I had known that eight months ago because it's been a frustrating period for me."

He said he hoped the next council would be more prepared to include clear conflict of interest guidelines and a code of ethics, "because from what I've been hearing during all of this, that's what the people are interested in having in there."

General said that despite the failure to reach the implementation phase, the process itself has provided considerable benefit to the participants. "We took it as far as we could and thank you very much to the community members who participated. It's been an education for everybody."