

Central cigarette distribution system for in Six Nations future?

Elected Council to review taking over cigarette allocation

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Six Nations members opposed to Elected Council's new Voluntary Business Registration policy not only got council to agree to consider rescinding the policy, but to also look into taking over the cigarette allocation system, which is currently handled by Ontario.

The council chamber was packed with guests from the Six Nations Turtle Island Trade and Commerce and the Men's Fire. Audrey Hill and Wilf Davies spoke for the nearly 40 people who packed the room Tuesday evening, objecting to the \$25 fee charged for the business recognition.

After a feisty hour of dialogue that at moments spilled into arguments between proponents and Elected Councillors, council agreed to reconsider its Voluntary Business Registration policy.

Turtle Island Trade and Commerce members are opposing to Elected council collecting money from Six Nations members. "This is a form of tax," said Davies.

Hill said registering with Elected Council means a business is registered with the federal government.

The representatives also complained about the lack of consultation about the new policy and process. Davies said they had only just learned about the policy last Wednesday through council's website.

Hill said council was misleading business owners, who believed they had to register their business with council in order to get a cigarette quota.

"It's not a tax. It's an administrative fee," Elected Chief William Montour responded. He said the fee helped pay for a person to go and check out the business and gather the necessary information needed to verify the business is legitimate. "If a business doesn't want to register, they don't have to."

"It's our thinking that the letter we've been giving previously has been abused so

much that a lot of people have been telling me it's almost impossible to get a cigarette quota," Elected Chief Montour said. "We're not in the cigarette quota business, that's Ontario." He reminded the business owners the letter of recognition used to say "this is not to be construed as information to get a cigarette quota."

In 1983 there were 150 quotas given out to Six Nations members. This year there are approximately 457 quotas, said Elected Chief Montour. He added a lot of Six Nations business owners are being encouraged to get Ontario vendor's permits. "When you get a vendor's permit, you're registered in Canada to CRA (Canada Revenue Agency). There's a number of businesses coming here, they're being attacked by CRA." People who get a Six Nations business certificate will be able to tell CRA they are registered as a Six Nations business and send the government agency to Elected Council.

The guests weren't buying the Elected Chief's explanation. Hill demanded the policy be rescinded. "People don't understand what they're saying yes to. You've not done enough community information and awareness to make these people aware that even if they do register with the province, they get in trouble with CRA because they file taxes and claims. We need to let them know, you need to let them know they do not pay taxes on the reserve."

"That's what we're saying," said Elected Chief Montour. "We are not tax collectors for anybody."

Hill said charging a \$25 fee for a business recognition certificate is a form of extortion. "Don't gloss it over, that's extortion ... If I have a quota and you're going to take it and then you're going to turn around and let me buy one for \$25 ... that is extortion. You need to rescind this."

"You don't speak for all of the businesses," Elected Chief Montour said. "Business owners tell me to keep going."

That sentiment was reiterated by Councillor Roger Jonathan (District Three), who said Turtle Island Trade and Commerce only repre-

sented approximately 20 percent of the business owners on reserve.

Andrew Jacobs, Junior Policy Analyst said there had been ongoing consultation with business owners since 2009. "I am aware of a letter that went out to businesses that had a letter of recognition," he said. "I'm also aware that a number of those letters were returned, returned to sender."

That information was not well received by Hill, who said she did not receive a letter, and she was aware a num-

ber of other business owners did not receive a letter from council. She asked the people in the room to put up their hands if they own a business, then asked them if they had received a letter.

The guests also urged Elected Council to take over the allocation of cigarettes to Six Nations members, suggesting that any monies that might be collected from community members to cover things like transportation costs be called a Harvest Contribution. Elected Chief Montour said he had thought

about building a central distribution warehouse, and said it was important to get rid of the quota system because it is discriminatory.

Elected Council refused to rescind the new business recognition process without consulting with those business owners who have registered under the new system, although the two councillors who had opposed the new business recognition policy, Ross Johnson (District Five) and Carl Hill (District Two) put a motion on the floor to rescind the new process,

but Councillor Bob Johnson (District Five) tabled an amendment to review the policy under advisement and to report back to the community.

When put to a vote, Johnson's amendment was supported, with five councillors in favour and four opposed.

Hill then asked council to address the matter of quotas. "Take it over. Make it work for the community."

Council passed a motion to investigate the take-over of allocations, with a deadline of September 2013 put in place.