

New residency bylaw coming, committee may open meetings

By Donna Duric
Writer

A community advisory committee has been meeting to develop a new residency law in the community but details are scarce since the media has not been allowed to attend the meetings.

The committee is considering opening the meetings to the media to report on the progress of developing the residency law, Band Council's Corporate and Emergency Services committee heard last Wednesday.

Tim Brubacher, council's policy analyst, said the committee will also consider releasing regular reports updating the community on the committee's progress if it doesn't feel comfortable having the media present at meetings. "We do want the media to be aware with what's going

on," said Brubacher. "The last thing we want to do is send a draft out to the community and say, 'here by the way is your new residency law and it's going to council next week', even though we have had this community committee involved," he said. "It would be beneficial I think to have the media aware of the development of it throughout so that can be reported to the community."

The idea to re-draft Six Nations' Residency By-Law, which states only band members can live on Six Nations, was introduced by band council last fall in response to federally-proposed legislation, Bill S-2. Canada's proposed Bill S-2 on matrimonial real property (MRP) suggests only one spouse must be a band member and gives the non-native partner the right to stay in the matrimonial

home on the reserve after a divorce or separation. Bill S-2 passed first reading in parliament last December and is currently awaiting second reading.

Brubacher said last fall that Six Nations' current residency by-law won't hold up against the government's proposed MRP law. Councillor Ross Johnson said the current residency by-law system is broken and it needs to be addressed.

"A large part of us (on Six Nations) have mixed relations when it comes to non-natives in our families," he said. "Me especially. I got a slew of them." Councillor Roger Jonathan said he didn't think committee meetings should be open to the media.

"The problems we've seen ever since we opened up (council committee meetings) to the media is

that...some people put things on the floor only for discussion and sometimes it doesn't go no place, yet next Wednesday it's all over the community and I have to answer for something that might not even come to fruition," said Jonathan. "I'm getting frustrated with that. I'd say no because we've got to be able to be comfortable with bringing things over to that committee that doesn't get blasted out over the community before we even have time to discuss it at council or the committee level."

Brubacher said opening the meetings to the media might stifle discussions.

"They want to be able to have that free discussion," he said. "We want the committee members to feel safe with bringing forward an idea that gets shot down and everybody hates

it or it's controversial and they don't want to be the one that gets their name tied to it. There's a balance there and I'm not sure what it is."

The committee met for the second time last week and includes a mix of community members with diverse opinions on residency, said council policy analyst Andrew Joseph.

"It's a very divergent group of opinions," said Joseph. "I'm confident that if we can come to a compromise at that committee, we will have no problem selling the law to the community."

Councillor Johnson said he thinks it will be a "challenge" for the committee to come to a compromise.

"We've got a lot of different views on that committee," he said. "A lot of these people that are sitting at the table are long-house, traditional people,

and Mohawk workers. It's going to be a challenge but we have to stay focused and move forward at every meeting. I think it went good the last meeting." Brubacher said it doesn't look like the committee will have an initial draft in place by June as planned.

"At the first meeting it was readily apparent that our work plan was overly ambitious," he said. "It became clear at that first meeting that it was going to be too fast for people to come to some consensus or agreement on that. Pushing something forward was only going to damage the developing relationship." He said the committee is asking council to approve an extension. The Corporate and Emergency Services Committee agreed to bring the recommendation to general council.