

Racial remarks, threats of ousting fuel hot Band Council debate

By Donna Duric
Writer

A Six Nations Band Council discussion on the future of the Burtch lands turned sour Monday when councillors and farmers hurled accusations and racial remarks at the Haudenosaunee Development Institute (HDI).

An angry Six Nations Band Councillor Helen Miller accused the Confederacy's planning department staff of abusing and taking advantage of Confederacy Chiefs and Clanmothers.

As the debate at the Committee of the Whole session grew heated District 3 Councillor Ross Johnson called for the ousting of the HDI from the community.

But it turned uglier when Six Nations Farmer's Association vice-president Art Porter hurled racial remarks at the HDI.

Ironically the remarks came just as Elected Chief Bill Montour told the meeting the Burtch lands should not

come back to Six Nations under the return to reserve program, fearing the Minister of Indian Affairs will continue to control the lands.

Instead Montour agrees with a Confederacy stand that the land must come back under the Haldimand Deed. It's a concept the Confederacy has been pushing since Mohawk Chief Allen MacNaughton negotiated the Burtch Tract lands be returned under the Haldimand Deed.

The Burtch lands have been mired in controversy since the Six Nations Farmers Association (SNFA) refused to sign a lease agreement with the Confederacy to farm the lands for the second year in a row.

The SNFA began planting crops on the property last week, defying a direction from the Confederacy to work out a lease with the HDI, the Confederacy's planning department.

Adding fuel to heated de-

bate, Dan Elliott, a local contractor, claimed his company, which is currently working on the clean up of the contaminated soil at the site, was kicked off the Burtch lands last week by the HDI.

However, Elliott may actually have been a victim of the farmer's push to farm the land without permission.

Aaron Detlor, HDI board member, said Elliott's workers were not kicked off by the HDI.

"His company was not kicked out of the Burtch lands," said Detlor.

"We had our monitor on-site advise Infrastructure Ontario (IO) the remediation needed to stop until the safety concerns were addressed. The farmers were discing next to the tree planters. If you got hit with a discer you'd be chopped into a hundred little pieces."

Infrastructure Ontario is holding the lands in trust

until clean-up at the site is finished sometime this September.

Councillor Helen Miller accused the HDI of committing elder abuse against Confederacy Chiefs and Clanmothers.

"They go in and talk and use these big words and aggressive nature," said Miller. "They don't ask - they just tell: this is what we're doing. Everybody sits there; they don't seem to be asking questions or making comments. To me, that's elder abuse. They're taking advantage of them."

Detlor denied the abuse accusation. "I think the chiefs are fully capable of understanding the information that we provide to them and the Chiefs are fully capable of making decisions," he said. "The Chiefs are fully capable of directing the HDI. We don't take any steps without the Chiefs' full knowledge and consent."

Miller, however, said she believes that Confederacy Chiefs aren't aware of what the HDI is doing.

"The Confederacy should know what their staff is doing. I don't think they do. Ask any Confederacy Chief what's going on - they don't know."

She said the HDI is "intimidating" Chiefs and Clanmothers. "I think they're all being intimidated so much they're afraid to speak against the HDI," she said. "I don't think they know what they're (HDI) doing and that really concerns me because they're manipulating and abusing our chiefs."

Art Porter, vice-president of the SNFA, accused Detlor and HDI Interim Director Hazel Hill of telling the chiefs what to do, while taking aim at their ancestry. "Two white people are running the chiefs; they're telling the chiefs what to do," said Porter.

Hill's father and Detlor's mother are both Mohawk.

"I don't think that racializing the issue addresses anyone's concerns," said Detlor. "If that's the level of discourse that he wants to enter into, he's going to have to do it by himself, because I'm not going to participate."

Detlor said the HDI has, "on-going and specific direction from the HCCC to ensure that safety issues (at Burtch) are addressed on an as-needed basis."

The Burtch lands have been at the centre of the division between band council and the Confederacy Council since last year when band council began claiming control of the Burtch lands, which were slated to be returned to Six Nations under the auspices of the Confederacy Council.

Mohawk Chief Allen MacNaughton had successfully negotiated the return of those lands in exchange for barricades coming down during the 2006 land reclamation.

Councillor Ross Johnson called for the HDI to be removed but he did not provide specific details on how band council would do that.

"My biggest concern is the HDI," he said. "We need to get rid of HDI. That's the big question. How are we going to do it and when are we going to do it? We can sit here and beat around the bush all we want but that's the decision that we have to make. What are we going to do?"

Councillor Johnson said afterward that he has ideas on how to remove the HDI, which are confidential, that he is going to discuss with band council.

"I got a lot of plans inside of me that I won't reveal," he said. "It has to be discussed. We have to do something."

Miller said it's up to the community to "get rid of" the HDI.

"The community I guess can get rid of HDI if the community stands up and

says we don't want 'em. It's up to the community to get rid of them."

Elliott said his company was told to leave the Burtch lands last Monday afternoon by the clean-up company Quantam Murray's project manager.

"They tell me that Aaron Detlor and Hazel have a lot of pull with Infrastructure Ontario," said Elliott. "The project manager called me (last) Friday and they told me they can't do nothing unless Infrastructure Ontario tells them to go back." Elected Chief Bill Montour had invited the farmers to Monday's committee meeting to "get a better understanding of what's going on."

The SNFA is farming the Burtch lands without a lease from either the Confederacy or band.

Detlor said there is no hope of signing one with them this year. He said another group of farmers is willing to sign a lease to farm the Burtch lands.

The SNFA started planting last Monday and is working about 290 acres of land, without permission from the band or Confederacy.

They said they'll donate the profits back to the community. They said they donated, \$15,000 to community groups 1st year after their first year of farming the land without permission. The SNFA's previous five-year lease with the Confederacy ran out in 2011.

Jesse Porter, another Six Nations farmer, said they couldn't afford the HDI's quoted lease rates of \$50 to \$175 an acre.

Aaron Detlor said the \$50 figure came on the advice of other farmers in the community. "We indicated to the (SNFA) that \$50 per acre was a starting point and that the amount of the rate was not critical whereas the signing of the

(Continued from page 9)