

Brant County told to accept land transfer or else

By Jim Windle

BRANT – The Municipality of the County of Brant and Brantford's city hall have been locked in a long political dance over the transfer of Haldimand Tract land that Six Nations believes was never sold or given to the city or the county.

The problem between Mayors Friel and Eddy seems to lie in that fact that the rural County places a premium on the value of good farm land while the City seeks to grow by developing on 5000 acres of this same farmland.

But there is a third stakeholder on that land, one whom the city seems to be totally ignoring in the process. The land being discussed is part of the 7,000 acre Johnson Settlement Tract, which was set aside two hundred years ago as a place for families of mixed marriage between settlers and Haudenosaunee to live and was only to be leased, and never sold.

Brantford's desire to absorb the acreage into the city has been floated for quite some time, although only recently has it become a bone of contention between the two municipalities.

Brant Mayor Ron Eddy and his council have been careful to include Six Nations in the conversation, but Brantford and its Mayor Chris Friel refuses to, and he is getting frustrated with whole af-



County of Brant Council met Monday night to discuss what is being referred to as an 'inflammatory and insulting' letter sent my Brantford's Mayor Chris Friel to Brant County Mayor Ron Eddy. PHOTO BY JIM WINDLE

fair taking so long.

On February 5th, Friel sent a terse letter to Mayor Eddie, which could be interpreted as a not so veiled threat, stating that unless Brant accept Brantford's offer to transfer the land from the County to the city, he would force the issue through the Provincial government.

Friel's letter gives until the end of February for the Brant Council to officially make up its mind on the city's transfer proposal, or else.

"Should the County fail to render its decision by that date," Friel's letter states. "I fully intend to take steps to advance my Council's Resolution of Dec. 2, 2013, which, as you know, authorizes me, in co-ordination with the City representatives on the Task Force, any and all action with the Province of Ontario, necessary to complete the boundary change between the

City of Brantford and the County of Brant."

Friel's letter can be seen in its entirety at www.tworowtimes.com.

Brant County Council responded Monday night to the letter, described by various members of that council as "inflammatory and insulting" for its accusation that Brant Council was blocking the transfer.

"There are things in this letter that are inflammatory and I didn't appreciate the letter when I read it," said Councillor Joan Gatward. "There is a nasty streak in the letter that should be responded to."

For her part, Six Nations Elected Chief Ava Hill, wonders if the province in fact would get involved in the mater, as Mayor Friel seems to believe.

"That's between them," she says. "The bottom line is, we still need to be consulted no matter

which way it goes."

The land in question is under a federally registered and recognized land claim, one of 28 still before the courts, most of which include lands assumed by Brantford as being under it's jurisdiction.

The County flatly denies Friel's accusations that the County has never responded to the city's plan for the land transfer, and they can prove that is in fact not true, pointing to at least two separate communications stating they wished to continue negotiations.

County Councillor Robert Chambers was particularly offended by Friel's letter and spoke out his frustration.

"My favorite line in the Friel letter is, that we terminated our membership on the (negotiation) committee, which is not quite correct," said Chambers. "Friel says, 'that move in my opinion

makes the resumption in negotiations difficult at best, and renders the county's commitment hollow at worst.'

"If there is any statement he makes here that is categorically incorrect, and totally inflammatory, in my opinion, it is to characterize county's commitment to boundary adjustment as hollow," he bristled. "That is, quite frankly, insulting to Mayor Eddy and the members of this council and I don't think it should be taken lightly."

Chambers' defense of his council's integrity didn't stop there.

"He (Friel) goes on to say, that although he adds the word respectfully, it is actually disrespectful when he tells us what we have to do, when we have to do it, and if we don't do it this is what he is going to do. And what he is going to do is take any and all actions necessary," he

continued.

"My submission would be that any and all actions that Mayor Friel and everyone should approve is to sit down cooperatively and inclusively with all stake holders, including Six Nations, to arrive at a mutually satisfactory boundary adjustment."

It is Chambers' opinion that Mayor Friel "wants to have no agreement, he wants to say we can't agree, and he wants the province to believe we can't. He is very disagreeable, and this letter is an indication of that."

Eddy and County CAO Paul Emerson, met with Friel and his CAO last Friday, and according to Eddy and Emerson, the City made it clear that they would not negotiate on the matter.

An official letter of response is being drafted to address Friel's accusations and threats.