

Land-use pact to continue despite Confederacy protest

By Vicki White
Expositor Staff

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OHSWEKEN — The province and the Six Nations band council are planning to continue with a land-use agreement despite opposition by the Confederacy council.

A press conference was set for May 22 to sign the deal, in which the province would pay \$445,000 for the use of about six hectares of land along Highway 54 which is claimed by the band.

Transportation Minister Ed Philip came to Six Nations for a signing ceremony, but it was postponed when traditional chiefs appeared to protest the agreement.

Allen MacNaughton, a Mohawk Confederacy chief, says the traditional chiefs have met with band council to discuss the deal, but have been unable to resolve their concerns.

"The Confederacy is the only governing body able to make any binding agreements in regards to our territory," he said.

No backing out

The chiefs also fear there will be no way to back out of the deal, at any time, once it has been signed.

They say the terms only allow the province to end the agreement, if Ontario no longer needs the land or if the land claim is found not to be valid and the land belongs to the Crown.

Benefit community

Phil Monture, director of land claims research for Six Nations, says it's a good deal and will benefit the community. "We're going to get something (for land) that they're using without payment already."

In the past, the federal government has permitted projects to go ahead, and said bands will get compensated later, if their land claims are proven to be valid.

Mr. Monture also said the deal will not affect the land claim and the band will continue to seek

proper compensation for the tow paths.

He emphasized that disputes between the elected and traditional governments do not help the community resolve its land claims.

"If the Confederacy and the elected councils worked out a mechanism where they could jointly settle land claims, that would enhance our ability to get these claims settled."

Will continue

Bruce Wells, a communications officer for the transportation ministry, said the government intends to continue with the deal and is trying to set up a signing ceremony sometime next week.

"We are under the impression that the traditional chiefs are supportive of the elected council," he added.

The Confederacy council wants it to be clear that they do not support the agreement and had nothing to do with the terms, said Mr. MacNaughton.