

# Polytechnic spending support falls short

## *Band council stalls on decision to commit \$4.5 in Rama dollars to new Six Nations Polytechnic building*

By Paul Baswick

OHSWEKEN — Band council failed Monday to commit \$4.5 million from the community's Rama purse for the construction of a new Six Nations Polytechnic building, opting instead to defer a decision on spending until Oct. 30.

The funding request, presented at Monday's general finance meeting by Six Nations Polytechnic executive director Linda Staats and board chair Ron Thomas, was put on hold after council accepted an amendment in a six-to-five vote to re-examine the request at the end of the month.

Refusal of an immediate financial commitment came as some councillors insisted they first have time to review the business plan for the proposed facility submitted by the Polytechnic delegation that night, while other councillors objected to allocating Rama funds out-

side the framework of a community trust board.

The Polytechnic delegation asked that half of the requested \$4.5 million be provided as a grant by council, and that the balance be issued by council as an interest-free loan repayable over a thirty-year period.

Although an overwhelming majority of councillors voiced support for providing funding for the proposed Polytechnic facility, there wasn't a clear consensus on when or how that commitment should be made.

"I think that it's only right to give council a chance to look at this plan," said Chief Wellington Staats.

"I think some council members would like to see it before a motion is put forward."

Linda Staats told council the information laid out in the business plan had already been presented to

council in June. She stressed the need for council to act quickly on a spending decision.

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# Polytechnic gets stalled

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"It's time to make a commitment."

That urgency was echoed by District 1 Councillor David Hill, who noted council had previously agreed to make a decision on funding a new complex once a business plan had been submitted by Six Nations Polytechnic.

"I think we should give them that \$4 million tonight," said Hill.

"I think it's about time we back up what we said."

District 6 councillor Ken Hill also spoke in support of an immediate financial commitment to Six Nations Polytechnic.

"We got the plan tonight...They have done their work. I'd be prepared to deal with this tonight also."

District 5 Councillor David General said that while he supported the project, the decision to fund the facility with Rama dollars should be made through a Rama Trust board, which council is currently in the process of establishing. He added Polytechnic might have been in a position to bring its proposal to the board already had council not delayed in establishing the trust.

"We're sort of caught here. We needed the support of this council for the Rama Trust three months ago. This council has chosen to let it drag on. It puts us in a very, very, very awkward position."

General added that although he was confident Six Nations Polytechnic would eventually receive funding for a new facility, he couldn't vote in favour of the request without first exercising "due diligence."

"Maybe we're going to have to bring the community in on this — I don't know."

Opposition to approving the \$4.5 million in funding went beyond the mechanics of how and when the money should be distributed. District 4 Councillor Alton VanEvery said he was opposed to funding any project using the principle of the community's Rama fund.

"I would be totally opposed to spending Rama dollars. I'm a firm believer if we ever want to make use of these Rama dollars in the future...we've got to stay at \$15 million, and we're almost there now," said VanEvery.

"If we go and spend everything we've got, three years from now somebody will say 'Well, you had \$20 million.' Sadly we'll have to say we gave it all away."

He said Rama dollars should be used for the benefit of the entire community, a condition he says the construction of a new Six Nations Polytechnic facility wouldn't meet.

"I think it's for the benefit of a lot of people, but it's not for the benefit of everybody," he said.

He told his colleagues a vote to provide immediate funding for the project might win them some popularity, but that the decision wouldn't be right in the end.

"If it buys you votes, that's fine. At least it's doing something," he quipped.

Councillor Ken Hill countered the construction of a new facility would be for the benefit of the whole reserve.

"I disagree with him when he says we're throwing our money away. I think our people's education is the future," said Hill.

Councillor David Hill put forward a motion to that council approve the funding that night, but did so reluctantly for fear the motion would be voted down and sent back to committee.

"I don't want it to be defeated, and I don't want it to be shot down."

Councillor Burnham added an amendment to Hill's motion requiring council to meet on the issue on Oct. 30 before making a decision. The amendment was approved in a six-to-five vote.