

# Walton concludes Riverbend Estates information sessions

By Jim Windle

**OHSWEKEN** – The second of two slated information sessions regarding a pending deal between Walton International and Six Nations Elected Council which will allow for development on Tutela Heights, was held Monday November 23 at the Six Nations Community Hall.

Easels were set up around the perimeter of the hall with various aspects of the Riverbend Estates Housing Development project displayed. One-on-one Q&A's were directed to Walton personnel, Archaeological Services Inc. reps, and Lonny Bomberry and Phil Monture representing Six Nations Elected Council.

The meeting was spread over 4 hours, between 3pm and 7pm with residents drifting in and out. There was no general meeting for open forum questions and answers.

A one-page info flier made available to those who came out, outlined the basics of the housing project and the pending agreement between Walton International and the Band Council.

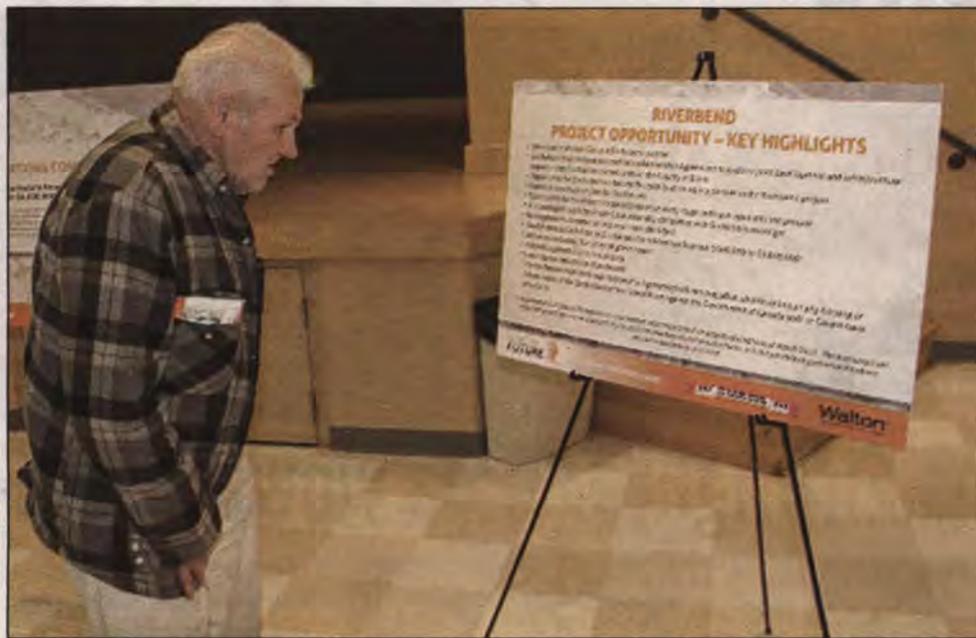
Because the conversations were one-on-one, simultaneous and spread throughout the hall, it was hard to get a read of what questions were being asked and what answers people were getting in return.

However, as previously reported, one main concern held by members of the public regarding the Riverbend Estates Housing Development is relative to the archaeology on the proposed site.

As reported earlier in the *Two Row Times*, there are known archaeological sites of significance within the Riverbend project on Tutela Heights, which may reveal burials and the location of a ceremonial longhouse of the Tutelo people who occupied this part of the Haldimand Tract.

Questions have arisen as to why known potential hot spots have not been included in the archaeological survey of Phase One of the Riverbend project.

According to John Dunlop, of Archaeological Services Inc. (ASI), they are well aware of several previous surveys and the



Mohawk elder Ron Hill looks over details of a pending agreement between the Six Nations Elected Council and Walton International, which would open the door to a large housing development at Tutela Heights on a plot of land rich in artifacts from the days when the Tutelo people occupied the heights and before. "That is my land, and the Band Council has no right in dealing it off on my behalf," he says. PHOTO BY JIM WINDLE

testimony of a longtime resident of the area, which point towards where the burial sites are and the location of the ceremonial Tutelo longhouse.

The Elected Council has issued a letter on the project stating that no burials or longhouse remains have been found and the project is a go, as far as they are concerned.

That statement is correct, in a manner of speaking, in that to date there have been no burials found. However, that is because the footprint of the entire housing project has been divided into four segments or phases, and the first phase is well away from previously reported burial and longhouse finds.

Dunlop says that the Tutela Heights region, and especially the section Walton wishes to develop, is very rich archaeologically, however, the finds from the Phase #1 area have been plentiful but no sensitive areas have been located to date.

"We have been working on this site for five years now," says Dunlop.

He also says that ASI is aware that there are many potentially important sites throughout the area, but that their contract is only to survey the Phase #1 area. Dunlop says that if and when the project gets to Phase #2, they would have to sign a new contract with an archaeological firm to survey and conduct digs in that section, and so on.

Regarding rumours of questionable Chinese

investment money driving the project, John Tlastairs, executive VP of real estate for Walton categorically denied that such is the case, saying the investors are all Canadian and it is Canadian funds that are drive it.

On the list of benefits to Six Nations the word "potential" is used a lot. To some, that may indicate that Walton is not obligated to follow through with its promises of "potential" employment for Six Nations builders and individuals during the construction phase.

The flier also states that approval of the project would create "an opportunity to bid on infrastructure work and potential for future housing construction work with homebuilders."

The *Two Row Times* asked Tlastairs what makes this "opportunity" important to Six Nations since anyone can tender for this work, with or without a Band Council agreement in place. This too is a "potential", but no actual promise.

Another part of this deal with Band Council is that Six Nations can buy 20 per cent of Walton's 5 per cent of the proceeds from this project, but if they are unable to come up with the \$51,000 they require, Six Nations can borrow that amount from Walton at "commercially reasonable rates."

Walton also states, "The Six Nations-Walton Group Partnership Agreement will not prejudice, abolish or impair any ex-

isting or future claims of the Six Nations of the Grand River against the Government of Canada and/or Government of Ontario."

However, the completion of the Walton project could irreparably damage the land and the use of that land by the people of Six Nations by allowing almost 400 homes to be built on it.

Ronald Hill, a Mohawk elder who attended Monday's meeting, stood opposed for other reasons.

"As a Mohawk, according to the Haldimand deed, that is my land, and the Band Council has no right in dealing it off on my behalf," he says. "Sixty-six percent of Six Nations are Mohawks, when do we have a voice?"

Tlastairs says that there are already agreements in place they have signed with the Six Nations Elected Council.

"We have two existing agreements with Six Nations Elected Council," says Tlastairs, "One is from 2013. We actually entered into an umbrella agreement, which talks about a structure of the opportunity for equity participation, infrastructure and jobs and that kind of thing, and it is specified in that agreement."

According to Tlastairs, the Riverbend project is the first project where there has been a definitive agreement established with a legal contract.

"Both of these agreements are already signed and agreed to, and subject to Six Nations Elected

Council who have approved it in principle, subject to the community engagement process," says Tlastairs.

That is not to say the community has to approve it, but only that they engage.

He explains that should Six Nations Elected Council approve, a formal contract will be entered into.

According to Tlastairs, if the people say no, it will be Council's decision to walk away and SNEC would not become an equity partner, but the project would still go ahead without them.

He was direct in stating that Walton is not considering the wishes of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs Council to have input and for the Haudenosaunee Development Institute to be consulted.

"Since we began our negotiations with Six Nations Elected Council, that is who we have built our relations with," he says. "While we respect the Confederacy and their traditional values and such, our relationship is with Six Nations Elected Council."