

Tri-councils teaming up to resolve Six Nations land claims

By Donna Duric
Writer

Six Nations, Brantford and Brant County elected officials have agreed to team up in the fight to resolve Six Nations' long-standing land claims.

The agreement came at a tri-council meeting at the community hall last Thursday where discussion of land claims dominated the evening while Six Nations police sat in a cruiser outside the hall.

"Land rights is a very important issue that's got to be settled," said elected Chief Bill Montour. "Until we settle that, we're going to stagnate and we can't do that. We've got a future to take care of. In our society, we look to the seventh generation. We've got to get this settled."

He said land rights issues could not be solved at the local level

"I want to see something come out of this (meeting)," said Montour. "I know we can't do it at the local level. This is where we all live together. This is where we have to get along."

"The problem is the federal and provincial (governments)," he said. "I'm hoping that we can put out a united front to those major governments and say look, 'you're sully the honour of the Crown when you don't want to settle these land rights issues.'"

It was the third tri-council meeting between the groups this year. They've been meeting since 2006 to tackle issues of common interest. Brant County Mayor Ron Eddy said he looked forward to bringing their issues to Ottawa together.

"I can't wait to joint lobby," he said. "We've got to spread the gospel of land claims settlement. It's got to grow and grow and grow and this time be settled."

The three groups said it might even be advantageous to invite Haldimand and Norfolk councils to join

them in their lobbying efforts.

"If we join with other communities such as Haldimand-Norfolk, we would be even stronger," said Eddy.

Brantford Mayor Chris Friel suggested the groups come up with their own process to deal with development and land claim issues.

"It's actually to our advantage if our three communities come up with a consult and accommodate program," he said. "I'd like to see us try something before December."

Six Nations Councillor Ava

"It becomes very difficult to develop partnerships when we feel threats hanging over our heads. It's very difficult to come up with positive approaches when we are often being scolded"
Brantford Mayor
Chris Friel

Hill said they should also try to enlist the help of local MPs and MPPs.

"We need to use those individuals to help us with advocacy," she said. "A lot of members of parliament don't understand our issues. They don't understand our history. It's going to require a number of meetings."

"I agree if three of us go there to talk about land rights it's going to be very empowering for all of us," she said.

Montour said they should look at working on green energy projects together, and suggested harnessing the power of the Grand River as a source of electricity for the three communities.

"Hydro costs are going to the roof and a lot of our elderly people are having a hard time meeting their energy needs," he said.

Economic Development Director Matt Jamieson said



Six Nations Elected Chief Bill Montour, Brant County Mayor Ron Eddy and Brantford Mayor Chris Friel to join forces to settle land claims. (Photo by Donna Duric)

rooftop solar projects are another good way of creating green energy. "There is real value there," he said. "The opportunities are coming fast and furious. We need to seize those opportunities." Montour expressed an interest in exploring fibre optic internet solutions for the three communities, saying it was faster, more stable and more secure than wireless internet.

The statement garnered incredulous looks from community members who attended the meeting. Ironically, earlier that morning, Montour and a number of band councillors stood by while police arrested a Six Nations man who was protesting the building of an Internet tower on Mohawk Road and Third Line. Band council had awarded an off-reserve wireless Internet provider a contract to construct a wireless Internet tower on band-owned land in return for lease revenues of \$3 a year. Previous attempts to stop the work resulted in the elected Chief enlisting the help of Six Nations Police to guard the area when contractors went back to work on the tower.

"He's a hypocrite," said community member Deb Springle, who attended the meeting with Arnold Douglas. Douglas was arrested for mischief earlier in the day after refusing to leave the property last week. Six Nations police were stationed outside the community hall throughout the meeting.

Lisa VanEvery, a Six Nations band member who lives on the unceded Johnson Tract north of Brantford, took the opportunity to speak to elected officials about Six Nations people paying property taxes on unceded Six



Lisa VanEvery disputes paying taxes (Photo by Donna Duric)

Nations lands. She said since moving into her home last year, she has refused to pay

Montour said she wanted to see something happen on land rights quickly.

"We see our territory dwindling every day," she said. "It's about time something tangible happens. Those taxes belong to us because



Ruby Montour talks to Brantford Mayor Chris Friel. (Photo by Donna Duric)

you're on our land. Don't let this just be a charade. I'm tired of rhetoric. We want something real."

Friel said he was a proponent of solving land claims but not with "threats hanging over our heads."

He said, "I think it's important as we move forward that we are very conscious of the words we choose. It becomes very difficult to develop partnerships when we feel threats hanging over our heads. It's very difficult to come up with positive approaches when we are often being scolded."

"It is very hard to build positive relationships when we have very negative approaches coming at us on a regular basis," he said.

Outside the community hall, Eddy got into an argument with Springle when he claimed the Dumfries Tract

of land he lives on was surrendered by Six Nations people. Springle disagreed, telling him the land is still



Deb Springle and Brant County Mayor Ron Eddy argue in hallway while Arnold Douglas watches. (Photo by Donna Duric)

her municipal taxes and doesn't believe Six Nations people should have to pay taxes on unceded lands. Six Nations activist Ruby

Elected Chief Montour agreed, saying "Let's move these yardsticks forward because if we don't, we're failing the coming generations."

part of the Haldimand Tract. Eddy stormed back into the community hall and refused to answer further questions from Springle.