

"It's not just a meth clinic," says Whitlow

By Jayson Koblun

OHSWEKEN - Councillor Bob Johnson opened up last night's Elected Band Council meeting in prayer, asking the Lord to give them unity, hope and vision. One thing that can be said for sure about a proposed meth clinic being approved on the reserve is that there is no unity on that decision.

Gail Whitlow, owner of Ancestral Voices Healing Centre in Ohsweken, came to elected council back in January and presented how she and her business partner, Licensed Pharmacist Shaab Syed, are looking to open up a pharmacy in the back-end of Ancestral Voices.

The pharmacy will offer various traditional healing practices, counselling services, a walk-in clinic and more. The business partners also plan on devoting a section of their clinic to be a methadone and sub-oxone dispensary. Council had several concerns that included security, insurance, safety and why the two business partners did not come to council for approval before setting their plan in motion.

Elected Chief Ava Hill told Whitlow that before she should move forward she should come back with her business partner and present all documentations and written letters of support that would help her credibility when it comes to the due diligence she claims to have done in preparing the clinic.

Since then, Whitlow and Syed have held a private grand opening for their clinic. The grand opening didn't symbolize that they were up and running and already handing out drugs, Whitlow said the grand opening was their way of showing the public that they weren't keeping any secrets.

Whitlow and Syed presented their business plan at last night's meeting, but not all councillors were pleased with the presentation.

"I'm a little disappointed with your presentation," said Councillor Mark Hill. Mark said at the last meeting Whitlow said that her business partner had all the proof needed to show that they are indeed following all of regulations involved in starting a clinic,

but their presentation last night didn't show that.

The room was filled with people from the community voicing their concerns. It was very obvious that no one completely agreed on whether Whitlow should get her clinic or not. Some people said that elected council should be thrilled to have someone in the community who is seeking to help drug addicts better their lives and get off hard drugs and others were greatly concerned with the clinics proposed location.

"I've talked to many people within the community who just are not OK with the clinic being run in the Ohsweken plaza," said Councillor Carl Hill.

No decision was made last night, Chief Hill said that a community meeting should be held soon so more people can have their questions answered about this potential treatment for an obvious problem within the community.

"We care about the people in this community and want to see them [addicts] helped," she said. "We just want to make sure that the community is involved and that protocol is followed."