

Community meeting says stop development on Haldimand Tract

**By Donna Duric
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Six Nations people say they want all development along the Haldimand Tract to stop until land claims have been settled.

That was the main message Six Nations residents delivered at a community meeting held at Polytech last Wednesday, capping off a day of heated protest in Hagersville over a townhouse development on Hwy. 6, which is said to be part of Six Nations' Plank Red. Claim.

Community leaders called the meeting to ask residents what they wanted to be done with any land that may be returned to Six Nations, after the government recently offered to return two parcels of land within the Haldimand Tract.

"What do you see in these settlements?" asked Confederacy political advisor Steve Williams. "In 1994, Canada acknowledged our land was flooded. They promised to pay for it. What are we looking for in the amount of compensation? If the government did come up with a deal, how would we ratify it with the community?"

But Six Nations people were more concerned with the development currently occurring on claimed land along the Tract.

"They need to stop all development completely," said Six Nations resident Angel Smith.

And she and other residents said simply asking developers to stop building isn't enough anymore.

They have to be shown, said Ruby Montour, long-time head cook at the reclamation site.

"While we're talking, they're building. It's because we're in their face that they're meeting with us and we can be in their face a lot more. Telling them doesn't do it, action does. Today should be a wake-up call for all of them. We're coming out fighting now."

Federal and provincial negotiators at the on-going Six Nations land rights discussions recently offered two parcels of land to be returned, including the 30,000 acre Moulton Township lot, and 2,415 acres of the Welland Canal plot.

"That's really thanks to the DCE situation," said Williams. "Stay until all the land issues are dealt with."

Six Nations resident Cheyenne Williams, who was one of the first women to bring the Douglas Creek Estates housing development to the attention of band council, said nobody listens when Six Nations tries to get people's attention on land claims through education or letters.

Smith agreed.

"No matter how many times you try to be nice, they turn around and laugh at us. Enough of being nice. You can be nice and blunt."

Cheyenne Williams wondered why Six Nations hadn't yet received the Burtch lands back, even though provincial negotiator David Peterson promised the land in May 2006 for the removal of the Argyle St. barricades.

"Why can't those barricades go back up? They went back on their deal."

Cayuga Sub-Chief Leroy Hill told her the land needs to be cleaned up before it's returned to Six Nations.

She also suggested that if developers threaten to fine Six Nations protesters and throw the courts at them, then Six Nations should do the same.

"They want to fine us, why can't we fine them? Why can't we press civil suits on them?"

Wednesday's protest caused government negotiators to leave the table.

Hill said he had received an e-mail on Tuesday night saying, "there's going to be repercussions if a reclamation is started by Wes Elliott and Butch Thomas."

Montour suggested Six Nations use its own bargaining chip when the government threatens to cut off talks.

"The federal government is constantly trying to stop negotiations. Tell them we'll put up so many barricades, they'll be up night and day removing them."

Ruby Longboat, who had spent some time in Hagersville earlier in the day, Told Six Nations that an angry woman from town told him they didn't want Six Nations people in the town anymore after last Wednesday's protest.

"They called us terrorists. They wanted the community to know they don't want our community to go to Hagersville. She said she was speaking for the whole community."

Confederacy benchwarmer Butch Thomas, who spent the day in Hagersville, said he spoke to a neighbour, the town's fire chief, who told him he was thankful Six Nations stopped the development because he didn't want to see a townhouse complex across his street.

"I commend the way our people conducted themselves. The people left the site as promised.

They made good their word."