

Brantford developer gets loud Six Nations' no to \$500 million development

**Donna Duric, Writer, Turtle Island News
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Six Nations community members issued a resounding no to a Brantford developer's plan to build a \$500 million project on lands under claim in Brantford.

Six Nations residents grilled a Brantford developer on his plans to build an industrial park on claimed land at a community meeting last Thursday, saying the people are adamant they don't want any more development on Six Nations' claimed land.

Only about 20 community members attended the meeting at Six Nations Polytech but emotions ran high as they firmly told developing company King and Benton President Steve Charest they did not agree with the \$500 million project.

"No more development," said Six Nations resident Kelly Powless.

"Our chiefs told you 'no more development on our land.' It's like you're not getting the message. No more development until we get those claims settled."

King and Benton wants to build a 4.7 million sq. ft. industrial park and retail power centre at the corner of Oak Park Rd. and Hwy. 403, the site of a former industrial gravel pit.

Charest calls his project "a re-development project" because he's building on a Brownfield site instead of eating up valuable farmland, and in the process, cleaning it up.

He also says his project is different than other developments because his buildings will cover 40 per cent of the 426-acre site, much higher than the City of Brantford's policy of covering 15 per cent.

"We want to come up with a way to do things better," said Charest. "Higher density will obviously lower the consumption of land and reduce sprawl."

The project would also create 5,000 new jobs.

Whatever the positives, the project didn't sit well with community members.

"What are we supposed to be, happy?" said Six Nations resident Robert Douglas. "You want me to agree with all of this stuff? No more development. What part don't you understand?"

He said if the developer didn't heed Six Nations' concerns, "we can deal with this the same way we dealt with it in Caledonia."

He was referring to Six Nations stopping a housing development on disputed land in Caledonia last year.

Douglas told Charest, "You better get your money back and walk away from this."

Charest has been working on the project since October 2003, He acquired the land late last year, and he said his company's research didn't reveal any information the land was under claim.

Charest blamed Brantford City Council for not informing him the land was under claim. He also wondered why the council did not inform Six Nations of the project under the protocols of the Grand River Notification Agreement (GRNA) which states municipalities along the Haldimand Tract are to inform Six Nations of any developments within its boundaries.

The Haldimand Tract consists of six miles on either side of the Grand River that Six Nations agreed to move to after the American War of Independence.

"We went and searched it right through the Crown patents," said Charest. "We didn't know it was under claim. We still don't know. We've asked. We can't get any such answers."

He was referring to meetings with both band council and Confederacy council's development committee.

During a meeting with the development committee, one of its members, Aaron Dettler, walked out and accused Charest of being racist, Six Nations resident Wes Elliott told the audience.

"Why did he do that? Elliott challenged.

"Aaron walked out of the meeting because he determined I was a racist," said Charest. "I don't know what made him say that, but that's the furthest thing from what I am."

Angel Smith, a Six Nations resident who is part of one of several groups that calls themselves 'the Mohawk Nation', wanted to know why Charest didn't consult with Six Nations earlier.

"Why is it that you're just now coming to our territory?"

Charest said the recent public attention given to Six Nations land claims prompted him to meet with Six Nations.

"I know there are issues and that's why I'm here today. I'm guilty of not knowing (about land claims) prior to these issues happening."

He wais he wanted to work in good faith with Six Nations during the course of the development.

Smith advised him that an example of good faith would be to put the project on hold until the claim is settled.

"If it's all good, you'll put yourself on hold," she said. "You're trying to make an attempt to soften us up. It's going to be beneficial, you will have the backing of our people. What you have to see, Steve, is the frustration of our people. We see how everyone else is benefiting off our territory. Everyone else is benefiting off our natural resources. Everyone else destroys mother earth just for the almighty dollar." Douglas told Charest he interpreted a working relationship with Six Nations as, "we're going to keep working together until I give in."

Charest did not have a response to the accusation, but said he was hopeful he could go ahead with the project.

He said he expects to get permits from the City of Brantford next month.

He is the second developer to be warned by Six Nations about land development.

First Guelph continued with its project after Six Nations people protested last winter.