



Christopher Smith, Expositor Staff

John Hanselman (left) and Horse Jamieson huddle around a campfire on Thursday as they continued to occupy a small island in the middle of the Grand River.

Protesters stop construction

By Michael-Allan Marion, Expositor Staff

A small group of Six Nations Confederacy supporters is waiting for the next move from the city after gaining an early victory in the defence of a land claim over a tiny island in the middle of the Grand River.

But it could be a long wait.

The city halted construction of its new trunk sewer line across the Grand after a work crew was confronted early Thursday morning by a small band of protesters who occupied a part of the island directly in the line's path the night before.

Mayor Bob Taylor confirmed the halt, saying "we have made no decision yet on when it will start again.

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The protesters, a handful of natives and non-natives, said they made the move because the river's islands and bed are the subject of an unsettled native land claim

Sewer project put on hold by city

or provincial governments had been called to the scene Thursday.

"We're respecting the natives' claims for the time being until we know anything different," said Mr. Zecca.

"We're leaving it to the city to sort this out."

Three protesters on the island said they felt pleased with the first developments and the company's calm response.

"(Mr. Zecca) has his job to do and we have ours," Horse Jamieson said as he heated water over a fire built from the wood of trees felled during preliminary work on the project.

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to Bud Wildman, Ontario Minister of Native Affairs and the Environment, outlining the situation and will meet Monday with members of the Six Nations elected band council to discuss construction on the project.

He also has scheduled a meeting with some traditional chiefs next Thursday to hear their side of the dispute.

"We're anxious to talk with them about this issue," he said. "The Confederacy has always been treated well by (city) council."

But Mayor Taylor would not tie a date to restart the project to any of those discussions.

"We had all the clearance we needed from the provincial government," he said.

'Get off the net'

By Michael-Allan Marion, Expositor Staff

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The protesters, a handful of natives and non-natives, said they made the move because the river's islands and bed are the subject of an unsettled native land claim against the federal government.

They spent Wednesday night on the island, vowing to remain until a settlement was reached.

When reporters checked early this morning, the campsite was vacant.

'Not over'

John Hanselman, one of the protesters, said in a telephone interview today that he did not know why the site was empty.

"Considering this is the worst storm of the winter, it wouldn't be surprising if for whatever reason things were held up," he said.

"The occupation is not over."

Work on the project started Wednesday. But a crew of 13 that showed up at dawn Thursday found the protesters, their lean-to tent and a sign reading: "Development will not be allowed on or through these lands."

Franco Zecca, vice-president of contractor Kast Construction Ltd., met with the protesters on an aquadam (a temporary plastic dyke filled with water) at a point halfway between the shore and the island.

After discussing the situation and learning that the group would not budge, he ordered the work crew to take the day off and called city officials.

No police or officials from the federal

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or provincial governments had been called to the scene Thursday.

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"We've got enough wood to carry this through. Sometimes we're a bit teary-eyed from the smoke, but certainly not from losing.

"If they come in with tear gas we'll be used to it," he laughed.

He said the city should not have proceeded with the project until the land claim was settled and certainly not without consulting the traditional Confederacy.

The protesters vowed to remain on the island until they were removed or until the Confederacy chiefs — who sanctioned the protest — told them to leave.

That doesn't seem likely to happen soon. "We'll stop that project until we are sure it's for the benefit of everyone," said Confederacy chief Arnie General.

"We know what we own and they know what we own," he said, adding Mayor Taylor should try to reach an agreement with the traditional chiefs instead of the elected band council.

He argued that it is not only an issue of preserving treaty rights, but also protecting people downstream from a dangerous project.

Mr. Hanselman said the island's ecology was not addressed in an environmental assessment of the project, which missed a number of species of birds and trees found on the island but uncommon to this area.

He added that the area is unstable because of a geological fault line.

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to Bud Wildman, Ontario Minister of Native Affairs and the Environment, outlining the situation and will meet Monday with members of the Six Nations elected band council to discuss construction on the project.

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"We had all the clearance we needed from the provincial government," he said.

'Get off the pot'

He blamed part of the problem on a failure by past federal governments to settle land claims with native bands in the province.

"Hopefully the Liberal government is going to get off the pot and start to settle them. We're just a pawn in this argument."

Brant MP Jane Stewart said she has alerted Ottawa to the problem.

"I was talking to the ministry office and made them aware of the situation. They're looking at the land claims that are at issue here — the river and the river bed — and I asked the ministry to consider getting a negotiator down here," she said.

"I think it's something we have got to deal with immediately. I don't want people out there freezing."

Mrs. Stewart said part of the problem is that many groups — including several levels of government, different ministries, and the band council and Confederacy — are involved.

"When I called the ministry I received a very encouraging response to look at what's going on here and to build a plan to bring people together. It's not a 'we-they' thing, it's an 'us' thing."

■ For more about the protest see Page A4