

Protest at Pikwakanagan

Group of demonstrators wants Pikwakanagan's council to pull out of land claim talks

SEAN CHASE
DAILY OBSERVER

GOLDEN LAKE - Protestors called on the council of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation to immediately pull out of land claim talks Sunday or resign their seats.

Less than 24 hours before eligible voters were to begin casting ballots to either reject or endorse an historic agreement-in-principle (AIP) on the Algonquin land claim, more than 60 demonstrators took to the streets calling for a halt to negotiations concerned that Pikwakanagan could lose its reserve status.

"Our beloved Pikwakanagan is at stake along with our rights as aboriginal people," Barb Sarazin, a member of the Grandmothers of Pikwakanagan, told a boisterous rally at the council house. "No more will we be divided and conquered. It's time to speak up because I don't want to wake up tomorrow with a great loss."

The AIP sets out proposed key elements to settle the Algonquin land claim, including a \$300 million payout to the Algonquins of Ontario, a transfer of 475 square kilometres of Crown land to Algonquin ownership, and recommended approaches to address such things as harvesting rights for hunting and fishing, forestry, provincial parks and protected areas, Algonquin heritage and culture and eligibility and enrolment. The provincial Crown land up for consideration includes more than 200 parcels ranging in size from a less than a square kilometre to approximately 120 square kilometres.

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Residents of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation march in protest of the current land claim negotiations Sunday, at the Pikwakanagan reserve. More than 60 demonstrators called for Chief Kirby Whiteduck and his council to pull out of the talks immediately.

Whiteduck defends council's position

PROTEST from A1

Ten Algonquin communities have been working together as the Algonquins of Ontario (AOO) under a protocol signed in 2004, to reach a settlement. Should the AIP be approved, demonstrators fear there will be a loss in jobs, more poverty and increased governance from Ottawa. They are further concerned that 7,000 non-status. Pikwakanagan members within the AOO will have a chance to vote on the AIP. Only 666 status members will be given a ballot.

"We have to do something to save Pikwakanagan," said rally co-organizer Dale Benoit-Zohr. "This is our home. Our children will have no roots system if this is gone. We need to make this process right and inclusive and one that saves our community."

The demonstrators peacefully marched from the intersection of Kokomis and Mishomis roads to the council house where they met with Pikwakanagan Chief Kirby Whiteduck, who has been directly involved in the negotiations on behalf of his community. They told him that he and the council should withdraw from the negotiations by March 4 or resign from their current positions.

Whiteduck addressed the rally assuring them that the AIP was not a legally-binding document and only sets the stage for further negotiations. He noted that



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Chief Kirby Whiteduck, of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation, responds to a rally Sunday at Pikwakanagan that was calling for his council to terminate its involvement in the Algonquin land claim as an agreement in principle is about to be voted on. Watching on is rally co-organizer Barb Sarazin.

with the election of a new Liberal government in Ottawa this is the opportunity to make positive changes for the First Nations. Under self-government, they could be in a better position to negotiate as have 22 other First Nations, he added.

"We believe we are looking out

for the First Nation," said Whiteduck who added he's worried they are losing too many status members. "Hopefully by entering self-government if we can negotiate a good enough deal we'll have more protections in the long run, protect our community and protect our children through an agreement

with government."

Whiteduck said that if this process falls apart now the province might not be keen to come back to the table and they risk the government changing to a party that may not look favourably on their situation.

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