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## Unions, natives united in opposing city plan (COMMENT ON THIS STORY)

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Anything Eagle Place residents want to know about an unresolved native land claim that bears the name of their neighbourhood and developers' plans for massive subdivisions, they can learn at a public information meeting at Bellview School gym on March 28, from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.

About 30 social activists from native, non-native and union groups gathered at Kanata Iroquois Village for a strategy session on Sunday, then hit the pavement of most streets in Eagle Place, distributing flyers advertising the event.

The Brantford-based peace group TRUE -True Row Understanding through Education is mounting the event to educate the public about the 200-year-old Eagle's Nest Tract claim that is at the heart of a dispute that is pitting Six Nations Haudenosaunee activists, the city and builders against one another in occupations, work stoppages, arrests and stymied development.

The organizers also want to ensure the neighbourhood is aware of peaceful native intentions, and the extent of plans by a group of developers to bring nearly 1,200 homes to the area, despite the claim.

The southern part of Eagle Place is also a key area of concern in a waterfront master plan that a council and consulting team has been working on for the past nine months, which could curtail development in the area.

"We stand by the principle that there is a legitimate claim, it should be respected and it should be negotiated," said Steve Watson, national representative for the Canadian Auto Workers, who was at the head of 15 activist union members.

"The rights of the claimants should not be ignored. Unions have to fight to get respect for their rights. We have a convergence of interests."

Seven times the city has tried to run a water and sewer line across Erie Avenue to service a 99-home subdivision by Birkett Lane that is still stalled. Each time, activists have been there to stop them.

The developers believe they have clear title to the land, and show deeds from the land registry system tracing ownership back to the original person they claimed acquired it legally.

Tom Keefer, with the Canadian Union of Public Employees and co-ordinator with the First Nations Solidarity Working Group, which brought eight activists, said that organization has been supporting Six Nations since the occupation of a housing project in Caledonia four years ago.

He hopes the educational exercise over the Eagle's Nest Tract claim will head off the angst that has engulfed Caledonia.

"This is an expression of union solidarity with indigenous struggles," he said. "We see a lot of similarities in this case as elsewhere. The government breaks treaties like employers break collective agreements."

Bill Squire, with the Mohawk Nation, complained that organization is not allowed at the table in negotiations since Caledonia that have yielded no result.

"We are on the outside, not able to participate in the negotiations," he said, while expressing his gratitude over the arrival of non-native, union and other groups.

"Development in Brantford has been running amok," Jim Windle, head of TRUE, told the gathering.

"The problem has been that is on land under claim that has never been surrendered. Negotiations have been going on, and while that is happening, development has been taking place anyway.

"As a human being, I can't sit and watch this continue to happen. There is an injustice here and we're trying to bring the truth out."

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BY THE NUMBERS

The Erie Avenue-Birkett Lane area is a green stretch of contested, mostly floodplain, territory on the south end of Brantford. It also is where developers have filed plans of subdivision to build a total of nearly 1,200 housing unit:

West of Erie Avenue and north of Birkett Lane -428 unit subdivision plan submitted by Harry and Helga Noderer in 1992, conditions not yet fulfilled.

Northwest corner of Erie and Birkett -99-house subdivision by Cambridge Heritage Management Corp. approved, but repeatedly stalled by native protests.

147 Birkett -219-unit subdivision planned by Stirling Bridge Ltd., application in progress.

339 Erie -60-unit townhouse complex by Multani Homes, application in progress.

Dover Avenue -38-unit townhouse complex by Multani Homes, application in progress.

104 River Rd.-Eight-house subdivision by Jack, Ruth and Ross Shrum, plan of subdivision conditions not yet fulfilled.

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