

MUSQUEAM LAND CLAIM

Transfer of golf club to native band a done deal, critics told

IAN BAILEY, Globe and Mail

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VANCOUVER -- B.C. Aboriginal Relations Minister Mike de Jong has told critics of a plan to cede the University Golf Club to a native community that the effort is a done deal, one of the critics says.

Marty Zlotnik, a political ally of Premier Gordon Campbell, also said yesterday that the minister ruled out a proposal to give the Musqueam band other land instead as a political non-starter.

But Mr. Zlotnik, who has been a fundraiser for the Premier in the past and organized annual leaders' dinners for Mr. Campbell, said he and his fellow activists will take their case to the Musqueam in a bid to save the 78-year-old club.

They are fine-tuning a pitch to encourage the 1,200-member Musqueam community to seek a 48-hectare piece of the Spirit Park in the University Endowment Lands instead of the 48-hectare course in Mr. Campbell's prosperous Vancouver-Point Grey riding.

Mr. Zlotnik said he met with Mr. de Jong about two weeks ago. The minister's office yesterday confirmed the meeting, but could not provide details on what was discussed.

"[Mr. de Jong] told us they had basically done a deal and they thought that the impact of giving up the golf course would be less than considering giving up anything in the Spirit Park," Mr. Zlotnik said.

"The government doesn't want to offend the greater community. It's easier for them to offend the rich golfers who play out at the university golf course."

Mr. Zlotnik said activists in the Save the Course group will try to win the Musqueam to their idea.

"We're going to have [the proposal] delivered to the Musqueam," he said. "We're going to lobby them. We're going to say, 'Look. This is a better deal.'"

The Musqueam have declined to comment on the negotiations except for a written statement that ruled out any development of the golf course until 2033.

Mr. Zlotnik, a lawyer and partner in the ZLC Financial Group, says the Spirit Park land is better because it could be developed immediately towards a value of \$600-million. That figure is based on an estimate of the park land being worth \$5-million an acre.

The Musqueam's 2033 timeline would give them only about \$500,000 a year in revenue from the operation of the club, he said.

The dispute was to be the subject of a community meeting last night at the club.

The Musqueam objected when B.C.'s Liberal government sold the golf course land to the University of British Columbia in 2003 for \$11-million. The band saw the land as part of their traditional territory.

The B.C. Court of Appeal ruled in 2005 that the province had not properly consulted the band, and called for the resolution of the issue within two years.

The move has prompted some anger in the riding against the Liberal government and Mr. Campbell as the riding's MLA, largely because of views that the government has failed to consult the community on the expected agreement.

Mr. Campbell has said little to address those concerns, but noted that all areas of B.C. have to make sacrifices to address native grievances.

Mr. Zlotnik's group is running ads in newspapers and has launched a website. And it is hoping to have a poll done by the end of the month on the issue.

"The battleground is going to be what does the public think is more important, saving the golf course and giving up 6 per cent of the Spirit Park or letting the golf course go and just taking it on the chin," Mr. Zlotnik said.