

Controversial B.C. golf-club deal with natives delayed

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FROM WEDNESDAY'S GLOBE AND MAIL
SEPTEMBER 19, 2007 AT 4:46 AM EDT

VANCOUVER — Premier Gordon Campbell says his government will take an extra three months to finalize a deal to cede the University Golf Club in his riding to the urban Musqueam band, according to a participant at the Premier's first meeting with community representatives on the issue.

The deal had been expected to conclude this month, but the Premier told participants at the Friday gathering in his constituency office that the government hopes to resolve it by the end of December.

"It looks like it's just a matter of working on the fine points, but it seems to me it's pretty much a done deal, that the ownership of the golf course is going to be transferred," said Bob Kasting, president of the University Endowment Lands Community Advisory Council, who attended the hour-long meeting at the Premier's invitation.

Mr. Kasting said two other community participants and former Vancouver-Quadra MP Stephen Owen, now an external relations vice-president at the University of British Columbia, were present.

The issue has spurred petitions, angry meetings and even a poll to counter the transfer of the 48-hectare course in Mr. Campbell's Vancouver-Point Grey riding.

Mr. Kasting also said Mr. Campbell flatly rejected the idea of preserving the golf course and giving the Musqueam land elsewhere such as in Pacific Spirit Park.

That idea has been advanced by activists in the area, including Marty Zlotnik, a leader in the Save the Course organization who has also been a fundraiser for the B.C. Liberal Party, but a tough critic of the plan to give up the beloved course.

"We asked him about it and he said, 'No. It's not on,'" said Mr. Kasting, whose organization represents about 4,000 residents in the area between UBC and Vancouver. "He said, 'You would just be upsetting another group of people by substituting the park for the golf course - words to that effect.'"

But Mr. Zlotnik said earlier this week that the delay in resolving the issue could be good news for opponents of the plan.

"Any kind of delay gives the Save the Course group a tremendous opportunity to build public support," he said, adding that a groundswell of opposition could make Mr. Campbell reconsider the alternative site.

"Maybe public pressure will make [this option] available," he said.

Mr. Zlotnik said he had no problems with being excluded from the meeting, noting that his group has been dealing with Aboriginal Relations Minister Mike de Jong, and is planning a meeting with him soon.

"Hopefully that will give us some more information about what's going on, and maybe it will just be a reaffirmation of what the Premier told the people he met with last Friday," he said.

The plan to return the site of the popular course to the 1,200-member Musqueam band follows a Court of Appeal ruling. The government sold the course to UBC for \$11-million in 2003 over the objections of the Musqueam, who claimed it as part of their traditional territory.

The debate began in June when The Globe and Mail reported that a deal was in the works for the B.C. government to cede the public course to the Musqueam.

The Musqueam have said little about the issue except to promise the course will remain as is until at least 2033.

Mr. Campbell's office confirmed the meeting, but provided no other details.

Mr. Owen said in an interview that he would rather not discuss, in detail, what happened at the meeting because he saw it as a private gathering, but said the entire situation is "very much in flux."

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