

Claims sank Wal-Mart: councillor

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DANA BROWN

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A Haldimand councillor is blaming Six Nations land claims for sinking plans for a new Wal-Mart store in Dunnville.

Lorne Boyko, councillor for Dunnville and Canborough, said he believes a recent decision to scrap the development is linked to ongoing land claims in the area.

He said that, in his opinion, the town is losing the Wal-Mart because of "the ongoing land claims and the inability of Calloway REIT (Real Estate Investment Trust) to begin construction on their site without First Nations interference."

Calloway owns land that was slated for development and Wal-Mart was set to be its anchor tenant.

Marc Charlebois, chief operating officer for Calloway, said yesterday he can't say whether Six Nations land claims were part of the reason Wal-Mart decided not to move ahead with the store.

"I can tell you that they decided not to go ahead with the store, but I can't tell you why," he said.

Wal-Mart did not respond to a request for comment by deadline.

The store would have added about 250 jobs to Dunnville, with another 100 added through spinoff businesses.

Calloway has met with the Haudenosaunee Development Institute, but Charlebois said it was not involved in negotiations with the HDI.

The native-run body was set up last year to oversee development along the Haldimand Tract, 10 kilometres on either side of the Grand River.

Hazel Hill, interim director of the HDI, rejected the idea that Six Nations land issues are to blame for derailing the project.

"The problem doesn't rest with the Six Nations or the Haudenosaunee or the HDI," she said. "We've set in motion a resolution, a process, for developers and municipalities to deal with the land rights."

Both Hill and Boyko criticized the provincial and federal governments for not resolving problems surrounding the land issues.

Greg Crone, spokesperson for Aboriginal Affairs Minister Michael Bryant, said in an e-mail yesterday the Ontario government is "continuing to work with the municipality to find ways to support the economic recovery and stability of Haldimand County."

He noted that Premier Dalton McGuinty announced more than \$4.3 million in infrastructure funding for the county yesterday, in addition to more than \$2 million previously provided to support economic recovery in Haldimand County and Caledonia.

dbrown@thespec.com

905-526-4629