

Take target off eyesores

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The city was blocked from moving forward with development on one site this week while moving ahead with plans to redevelop another site. Six Nations protesters, including a rare endorsement by Six Nations elected band council Chief Coun. Bill Montour, halted an attempt Monday by city workers to begin work to provide servicing for a proposed development at Erie Avenue and Birkett Lane.

Later Monday evening city council backed a plan to redevelop a stretch of buildings along Colborne Street to build a health centre at street level with affordable housing apartments on top.

The difference between these two?

If you take Montour and his fellow protesters at their word that the Erie and Birkett site is being targeted because it involves protecting the land and the environment, they should applaud the Colborne Street project because it involves redeveloping an existing site.

"Concrete doesn't allow you to grow good crops and, on behalf of most of us on the elected council, we're behind you on this one," said Montour.

If the protests and occupations are aimed at preventing development on land to both protect the environment and ensure there is remaining land left with which to settle aboriginal land claims, then the redevelopment of greyfields in Brantford should receive support from Six Nations.

How about a Six Nations rally in favour of converting vacant buildings into active businesses or housing?

We suggested earlier this year that Six Nations protesters declare specifically that they will not target projects to rehabilitate greyfields and we make that call again.

Almost all of the native protests have been aimed at projects on the periphery of the city involving developing land with nothing on it.

We understand their point in targeting these projects even though we may not agree with their methods.

They even have supporters among the non-native community, especially with the Erie and Birkett project. Coun. John Bradford admitted as much to The Expositor.

"These people perhaps naively don't understand that they are hurting the economic development of Brantford," Bradford said of residents sympathetic to the activists.

Decrepit buildings dotting the city's landscape aren't good for economic development either.

That's why Six Nations activists should throw their support behind projects to redevelop these eyesores.

It's an opportunity to show the people of Brantford that the protests are thoughtful and not capricious, while forcing both developers and the city to focus attention on these urban blights.

Greyfields may be more expensive to develop than a project on virgin land, but when you consider the delays caused by protests and occupations projects like these might become more attractive.

In return, the community gets less ugly and the common goal of less environmental damage is served.

An opportunity to forge an alliance with a neighbour should never be overlooked.

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