



St. Regis Mohawk Tribe

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NEWS RELEASE

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Tribe Maintains Negotiation of Land Claim Settlement Preferable *Land In Trust Seen As Viable Option and Next Step*

Akwesasne, NY - The Tribe's thirty-year land claim was positioned to progress towards final settlement earlier this year, when the historic and controversial Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe, St. Lawrence County, the New York Power Authority and New York State. Each party, agreeing to lucrative terms, expected Franklin County to agree to similar terms within a reasonable timeline that would ultimately resolve the long-standing boundary issues, and return the ancestral Mohawk lands to rightful owners. The advancement of the land claim requires Franklin County to come to terms with the State and Tribe and, after six months, a negotiation date has been scheduled for early next month.

The Tribal Council has maintained their position that a negotiated final settlement is preferred in which all parties agree to terms that take all sides into consideration. The MOU signed with St. Lawrence County outlines a lucrative settlement in exchange for the right to purchase land from willing sellers. "There are significant benefits to resolution through a negotiated settlement with both surrounding counties," Chief Beverly Cook commented, "we strongly prefer negotiations with our neighbors over litigation and the land in trust process; it is lengthy, expensive and there are limited benefits to Franklin County." The land in trust process was tested after the 2005 settlement negotiations fell apart. In June of this year, the SRMT received notification that an administrative ruling has cleared the way for the tribe to expand its territory as a result of a 39-acre land in trust application, filed in 2007. Once the Secretary of the Interior recognizes the land as part of Akwesasne, there are no further property taxes owed and the property will be treated as reservation land which the Tribe exercises jurisdiction. Taking land into trust by the federal government protects it from ever being re-taken by either the State or the County. Differing from the negotiated settlement being sought by the Tribe, land into trust does not require agreement of Franklin County or the Town of Fort Covington, it does not require that payments to the towns be made in perpetuity to make up for any potential property tax losses moving forward, and there would be no financial obligations from the State to the counties in lieu of the right of Mohawks to purchase land, as there would be under a negotiated final settlement agreement.

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The MOU outlines a potential settlement that provides the Tribe with the right to reacquire lands while providing St. Lawrence County lucrative benefits. These discussions were the result of meaningful and thoughtful negotiations between the Tribe, the County and the State. “Our people have endured loss of our language, our culture and our land, but in recent years, we’ve seen economic success as a result of our business enterprises and a re-emergence of our culture and language. We have an obligation to return our land to our children and finish the journey our ancestors started. We want the leaders of Franklin County to come to the table ready to negotiate in January. Our families work together, we need to do the same,” affirmed Chief Paul Thompson. Under the terms of a negotiated settlement, local governments will receive financial incentives that would not be required under the land into trust process.

The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe established a resource, www.resolveboundary.com, where the facts behind the proposed settlement terms are explained.

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The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council is the duly elected and federally recognized government of the Saint Regis Mohawk People.