

Urban reserves opposed

SARNIA WAS ONE OF CITIES INVOLVED IN SURVEY

By STEPHEN HUEBL
The Observer

Sarnia residents are among the most skeptical of a government plan to create new First Nation reserves, a new study has found.

Of those polled in Sarnia and Quebec City, nearly 80 per cent said there would be limited or no benefit to the regional economy.

The results are somewhat surprising, said Sarnia Mayor Mike Bradley, considering Sarnia is one of only two communities in Canada with a First Nation reserve located completely within its border.

But it indicates there is work to be done on educating the public, he said.

"The leadership, both on my side and with the Aamjiwnaang (reserve), have to do a better job of explaining to people what the benefits are," Bradley said.

During the recent election, Bradley campaigned on a platform of good relations between the city and Aamjiwnaang — a relationship many take for granted, he said.

"In many ways I welcome this (report) and hope it will spur this on," he said.

Sarnia was among eight Canadian cities situated near First Nation reserves that were surveyed for the poll commissioned by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

It found 51 per cent of non-aboriginals oppose the idea of creating new reserves in urban spaces, while 42 per cent are in favour of the idea.

The poll was released on the heels of a government plan to relocate the residents of the troubled reserve of Kashechewan in Northern Ontario.

A report from Indian Affairs suggested moving the 1,550 residents to a more urban location, such as Timmins, 450 kilometres away.

Bradley said the Kashechewan proposal is vastly different from Aamjiwnaang's arrangement with the city.

"It seems to me we've avoided some of the things that have happened elsewhere because there's a higher level of understanding and integration between us," he said, noting more First Nations people live within the city than on the reserve.

"We went through a massive land claim here, we went through the Ipperwash trial and we did it in the spirit of co-operation," he said. "That,

to me, speaks to the value of the relationship."

In the Leger Marketing poll, 400 Sarnia residents aged 18 and older were questioned among 3,208 interviews conducted across the country.

Other findings from the survey included:

- Of the Sarnia respondents, 77 per cent feel relations between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people in the region are good. Another 16 per cent said the relationship is bad.

- When asked if they thought aboriginal people in the region are responsible for most of their problems, more than half of the Sarnia respondents agreed with that statement. Of those, 19 per cent said they totally agreed, while 33 per cent said they somewhat agreed.

- Nearly 70 per cent of the Sarnia respondents also said they agreed with the statement that aboriginal people in the region rely too much on governments. Thirty per cent said they totally agreed, 38 per cent said they somewhat agreed and 26 per cent said they disagreed.

- Nearly 60 per cent of respondents said they don't think aboriginal people are victims of discrimination in the workplace locally, while 36 per cent said they do.

- Sarnia had the highest percentage of respondents who said aboriginal people are better off in regards to taxation compared to non-aboriginals. Only three per cent said aboriginals are worse off.

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By DAN McCAFFERY
The Observer

Local environmentalist Allan McKeown says the Ontario government can't win the war on pollution simply by relying on ordinary citizens to clean up our air and water.

McKeown made his comments after Envi-