Country club members OK land-sale talks

BY STEPHANIE MACLELLAN
THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL

Thunder Bay Country Club members want to make a three-way deal with the Lakehead District School Board and Lakehead University that would bring a new high school to the first two holes of the golf course.

Club members voted more than 90 percent in favor of proceeding with negotiations to sell the land to the school board, country club general manager Russ Knibbs said Friday. The club’s 260 members voted Thursday night.

The board wants to open a new school for Grade 7 to 12 students in September 2007, to replace Hillcrest High School and Port Arthur Collegiate Institute.

Knibbs said the school board approached the club with a proposal for the land earlier this year. Under the proposed agreement, the board would buy 12 acres of land at the corner of Oliver Road and Golf Links Road, he said.

In return, the Lakehead University would sell or lease a parcel of land to the golf course to replace the two holes. The McIntyre River cuts through that property.

“We’re getting the value of the one property, and we’re getting some great golf land,” Knibbs said. “There’s some whitewater there.”

The deal could also lead to new partnerships between the school board and the university.

“We would have a natural progression for students coming from a high school next door to Lakehead University,” said Michael Pawlowski, the university’s vice-president of administration and fin-
nance.

“We would probably develop advanced standing courses, so some of the high school students could attend Lakehead before they actually graduated. And it makes sense that if you took those courses, you would come to Lakehead.”

There could also be partnerships to share Lakehead’s athletics facilities with the high school if the deal goes through, Pawlowski said. The revised property lines would also let the university run a sewer line from the fieldhouse to Oliver Road, instead of pumping sewage over the river, he said.

School board officials would not comment on the country club vote, because board bylaws prevent them from publicly discussing property matters until they’re finalized and approved.

The board is “actively looking for sites” for the proposed high school and elementary school, which will likely be in the Jumbo Gardens area, board spokesman Bruce Nugent said.

The Thunder Bay Country Club has been trying to sell its property for about two years. Late last year, a deal to sell to a Toronto-based company and take over Centennial Golf Course fell through.

Knibbs thinks a high school would make a good neighbour for the country club, because it would be closed during the golf course’s peak summer months.

“Of all the partnerships we’ve had offered to us, we believe the school would be very suitable to be a partner for us,” he said.

Representatives from the board will continue to negotiate with the country club’s managing directors until a deal is reached, he said.
New high school plan on hold

Public board reviewing its closure process

BY STEPHANIE MACLELLAN
THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL

With the latest round of public school closures up in the air, a three-way property deal between the Thunder Bay Country Club, Lakehead University and the Lakeshore District School Board is on hold.

The plan would have brought a new high school to the country club property, on the corner of Oliver Road and Golf Links Road, said Russ Kobick, general manager of the country club.

"We're in a holding pattern for the school," he said. "I think we'll be waiting until the spring to see what the decision is."

The high school was to be built to replace Fort Arthur Collegiate Institute and Hillcrest High School, on the chopping block for 2007. But the board plans to re-evaluate its 2007 school closure plans using new Ministry of Education guidelines, as outlined in the David Cook report.

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Property matters in place

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Earlier this year, country club members voted in favour of selling 12 acres of golf course land to the school board to house a new high school, Knibbs said.

The country club would then buy or lease land from the university to replace the two holes where the school would be built.

The university, in turn, was looking at a long-term lease to acquire the PACI building and property, said Michael Pawlowski, LU vice-president of administration and finance.

He didn't say how the university would use the PACI building if the transfer goes ahead, except that it would be for "educational purposes."

"It would stay in the same general field it is right now, and that's education," he said.

Thunder Bay city council on Monday recommended the city approve the transfer of PACI property to Lakehead University.

That was necessary because when the title was set up, it prevented the school board from moving the property without city approval, said Steven Fereniuk, board superintendent of corporate services.

"We have not moved to do anything with PACI," he said.

The board agreed to work with the ministry to develop a new school valuation procedure for the seven schools and Gorham and Wan School, which was originally to close in June. The two parties are working together to develop criteria that will be used to evaluate the schools, said board spokesman Bruce Nugent.

Once the criteria are in place, the board will use the system to decide if the schools stay open or close.

"On the books, the trustees still made the decision (to close the schools) on Jan. 25," Nugent said. "But we made an agreement to use this valuation tool to look at these schools again.

"Everything is dependent on this tool, and how it's going to work."

It's not clear when the valuation process would start.

The country club is prepared to move ahead with the land deal. There are some plans and designs drawn up for the new holes, Knibbs said.

"Our relationship is still very strong with the school board," he said. "We're hoping it moves in that direction, because we think they'd be a good fit for us."

The other schools on the 2007 closure list are Balsam Street, C.D. Howe, Forest Park, Sherbrooke and Sir John A. Macdonald.
Land swap proposal slammed

BY SARAH ELIZABETH BROWN
THE CHRONICLE JOURNAL

Some Lakehead University students are protesting a deal that would see a golf course expand onto the campus and say they were "asked for input."

But university president Fred Gilbert said Medlar the deal is good for the institution and that there was no need to consult students on the matter.

The protest comes over a three-way land swap involving Lakehead University, Lakehead Public School Board and Thunder Bay Country Club.

A new grades 7-12 school for students from Fort Arthur Collegiate Institute and Hillcrest High School — slated for closure — would be built on 12 acres of golf course land at the intersection of Oliver Road and Golf Links Road.

In return, the country club would get 24 acres of university land east of the golf course. The university would get the PACI building.

Gilbert said it would be "totally inappropriate at this point" to explain the university's plans for the high school building.

The rezoning application is to go to city council Feb. 20.

Earlier this month, about 88 students, faculty and staff formed Lakehead University Community Taking Action Locally (LUCTAL) to oppose the land proposal.

The group plans an information session Wednesday at 12:30 p.m. in the Outpost and started a petition calling for the zoning amendments to be rejected. The petition bears 1,400 names so far, said Adam Krupper, president of the Lakehead University Student Union.

The student union is helping the group with printing costs and is paying for the bus that will leave from the Agora circle at 5:30 p.m. Feb. 20 to go to city hall.

In a news release, LUCTAL says the land swap would mean the loss of ecologically-sensitive land along the McIntyre River that LU's own advertising campaign uses to attract new students.

As well as echoing others' complaints about a "mega" school in an area students can't walk to, the group questions the idea of having young high schoolers and university-aged students on the same property.

Representatives from the group did not return calls Monday.

* Continued on page A4
Lakehead University Student Union president Adam Krupper walks a multi-use path behind a campus residence Monday. A student-led group wants the area protected from a proposed three-way land swap.

Students concerned: LUSU leader

*Continued from page A1*

The “riparian zone” along the McIntrye is the last one on campus, said Krupper. Students use the area for recreation and appreciate the chunk of natural land, he added.

“To them it’s one of the defining features of Lakehead University that makes it really unique,” he said.

For students in residence, it’s their wooded backyard, said Krupper.

“It absolutely hugs their living space,” he said.

Gilbert said any deal would require promises of little or no tree cutting.

“There are lots of other natural areas on campus,” he added.

The plan would also mean moving the piece of Trans Canada Trail that goes through campus.

For many, the fact they learned about the rezoning application only a couple of weeks ago when the city’s notice was printed in The Chronicle-Journal was what made them “just livid,” said Krupper.

In his six years at the university, he’s never seen students so concerned about the state of their campus, he said.

Krupper and another LUSU executive met with Gilbert and other administrators Thursday about the LUCTAL information pamphlet.

Gilbert said some of the group’s information is wrong or doesn’t truly explain the situation.

While some administrators points in that “angry meeting” were splitting hairs and others were valid, Krupper agreed, the bottom line doesn’t change.

“It doesn’t change the fact that land is slated to be rezoned for the golf course,” he said. Adding students’ frustration is there’s never been a public forum for students to discuss the plan.

At this point, “we’re still in the preliminary stages of setting an opportunity up,” said Gilbert.

“Certainly the university wants to be a co-operative partner for the community, and should the Lakehead District School Board go forward with plans for a new high school, we want to see what we can do to accommodate that,” Gilbert said.

“This is a board of governors decision and students have representation on the board of governors,” said Gilbert.

“If we felt that this was a decision that required student input, we would be seeking it.

“What the board of governors decides is in the long term interests of the institution.”
Students rally against land swap plan

BY SARAH ELIZABETH BROWN
THE CHRONICLE JOURNAL

Standing by placards reading "Keep the 'true' out of forest" and "LU—just another golf course," Lakehead University students spoke out Wednesday against a proposed land deal that could see a golf course expand onto campus green space.

Organized by newly-formed Lakehead University Community Taking Action Locally (LUCTAL), the session in the university's pub attracted about 150 students, many from programs that used the land in question, such as forestry biology and outdoor recreation.

After the information session, students marched to university president Fred Gilbert's office.

Gilbert addressed them in the Atrium, asking them to take a look at the plan's details once they're made public before jumping to conclusions.

Students who spoke at the information session said they're worried about the future of a natural feature and the wildlife on it they say is part of what makes their school special.

The three-way deal would see land at the corner of Oliver Road and Golf Links Road go to Lakehead Public Schools for a new high school.

In return, the Thunder Bay Country Club would get university land along the McIntyre River and the university would receive Port Arthur Collegiate Institute, which the public board has decided to close.

At the school board meeting Tuesday night, one trustee noted the university students' protest, and sought reassurance from administration that the board could continue to operate PACT and Hillcrest if the golf course remains was not approved.

The remaining applications go before Thunder Bay city council on Monday.

"We paid for a particular experience," said LUCTAL member Ian Wells. He argued the plan would "fragment" the campus if some students were located in PACT's downtown building.

He questioned the wisdom of having students as young as Grade 7 mixing with the university population.

Another speaker noted concerns about Thunder Bay's future and the problem of youth leaving.

"Our natural beauty is one reason why people choose this city," she said, adding the university and hospital both attract young people to Thunder Bay.

"Why, if we have a positive way to stand out, would we destroy that?"

Stacey Carnochan
Lakehead University resident assistant

Students listed programs that use the contested land, including forestry, geology, and the outdoor recreation, parks and tourism school.

Losing that outdoor classroom will mean more busing and costs to students for field trips farther afield, one third-year student argued.

Two aboriginal sweat lodges are on the land, and one speaker argued an expanded golf course will mean more chemicals such as fertilizers in the McIntyre River.

Stacey Carnochan, a resident assistant, said Lakehead University boasts some of the best scenery enjoyed by any post-secondary students who live on campus.

"Why if we have a positive way to stand out, would we destroy that," she asked.

She suggested the new high school will mean more privacy and security concerns for residence students.

Carnochan also suggested the proposed high school would mean more families wanting to move to the area, increasing already tight competition for affordable housing near the campus.

Lakehead University outdoor recreation and geography student Kim Rapaiu wears a leafy headress during a rally Wednesday to oppose a proposed three-way land swap to accommodate a new high school in Thunder Bay.
Land swap talk draws huge crowd

BY JONATHAN WILSON
THE CHRONICLE JOURNAL

Opponents of Thunder Bay's proposed new high school and re-located golf course beside Lakehead University got to have their say at city hall Monday, and some council members are listening.

About 150 people showed up at city hall where the proposed land swap involving LU, the Lakehead District School Board and Thunder Bay Country Club was the subject of a rezoning application.

More than 20 opponents listed a variety of concerns, but not before the three proponents, LU president Fred Gilbert, TBCC president Frank Talarico and Lakehead board acting director Ian Sutherland, were put on the hot seat by councillors.

Coun. Mark Bentz, one of five former school board trustees on council, said he has been inundated with phone calls from constituents about the issue.

Councilors had questions about the board's decision to close Port Arthur Collegiate and Hillcrest High School in favour of a new centrally-located school.

Sutherland said no matter what happens with the rezoning request, the board can't continue to operate both PACI and Hillcrest because of declining enrolment.

The TBCC property at the corner of Golf Links Road and Oliver Road, he said, is the best site for a new, modern high school.

"We were looking at programs that we might be able to develop with all of those other institutions that were there," said Sutherland.

Coun. Iain Angus pointed out that a secure custody young offenders facility is across the street, and plans are in the works for a hotel on the opposite corner.

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School site assessments recommended

*Continued from page A1*

"It's one thing to have a school in a neighbourhood where you know all the neighbours," said Angus. "This is a place where you won't know who they are."

Sutherland said the proximity to the hospital, university and golf course will be of benefit to the students.

The proposal includes a plan to use LU property along the McIntyre River for several new golf holes to make up for space lost for the high school.

Talarico pointed out that the existing golf course surrounds part of the waterfront, and has for nearly a century.

"The fishing is good there, so we must be doing something right," said Talarico.

Some LU students have complained that they are losing natural wilderness, a notion challenged by Gilbert.

"During the time of the year when the golf course is in fact not being utilized for golf, students could have access to that site to conduct their academic activities," said Gilbert.

"We see a real compatibility in terms of the three-party arrangement," LU will receive PACI as part of the deal for its faculty of education.

Angus asked Gilbert why the school wants to take over the century-old building, rather than build a new facility on campus.

"It's an expectation that this would be a permanent move," responded Gilbert, adding there appears to be little government funding on the horizon for new buildings for undergraduate studies.

Gilbert presented aerial photos showing that the current forested area was actually cleared farmland until about 1970.

City development manager Mark Smith said the proposed developments are compatible with the surrounding area.

Smith did recommend that environmental and archeological assessments be completed on the property in question, along with drainage and traffic reports.

The matter drew a huge crowd of LU students and others opposed to the development, filling the third-floor council chambers, a nearby meeting room and the main-floor lobby at city hall.

LU student union president Adam Krupper told council there's been no consultation and almost no notification to the community about the proposed changes.

"The safety, security, privacy and recreation of resident students is directly jeopardized by these proposals," said Krupper. "Our aboriginal students will have their sacred grounds completely surrounded by development and school children."

Roisin Kyne, spokeswoman for the group opposing the development, added that the privacy of LU students will be disturbed by golfers and high school students.

Gilbert earlier stated that the decision to enter into the land swap agreement is under the jurisdiction of the LU board of governors, a comment aimed at opponents who have been critical about the lack of public and student consultation on the plans.

City council was to vote on the rezoning application late Monday night. The outcome wasn't available.
Opponents to a land scheme to build golf holes on Lakehead University grounds and a new high school on the golf course scored a hole-in-one Tuesday.
"It was an amazing night," said Adam Krupper, president of the Lakehead University Student Union, about Thunder Bay city council's early morning decision to reject the rezoning application.
Under the proposal, Lakehead School Board would receive land from the country club to build a mega high school at the corner of Oliver Road and Golf Links Road; the school board would give Port Arthur Collegiate Institute, slated to close, to the university for its faculty of education; and the country club would get university land along the McIntyre River to replace the golf holes that would be lost to the high school.
Council's decision sends the deal's proponents back to the drawing board.

*Continued on page A3*
Schools closing in 2007

Contended from page A1

"It was certainly disappointing," said Ian Sutherland, acting director of the school board.

Sutherland said the board will explore its options, adding other sites have been considered to a school to replace Hillcrest and PACI.

But board chairman Ron Oikonen said the other options have little hope of seeing the light of day.

He said the rejected site was ideal because it offered more space for a high school than the other proposed sites.

He said Tuesday afternoon that he couldn't think of "any other location" that would be suitable for a high school, unless space was targeted "way out in the country in the middle of nowhere."

Alternate sites have not been made public because they involve property transactions, Sutherland said.

PACI and Hillcrest are to be shut down in 2007. If a new school can't be built by September 2007, some of the 1,100 students might stay at one of the old schools and the rest could be sent to other schools in the city, Sutherland said.

Meanwhile, the university remains "desperately short" of space, said LU president Fred Gilbert.

"PACI would have been a real asset for us," he said, referring to the building's potential to serve its education faculty and other academic areas.

Gilbert hasn't "ruled out anything" in terms of options, including an appeal of council's decision to the Ontario Municipal Board.

Councillors appeared to axe the application over concerns about university and high school students intermingling if a school were built on the proposed site. Getting students to the new school was another concern.

Coun. Mark Bentz said more students would have to be bused or driven to school, instead of walking.

"Making a high school there didn't make a lot of sense," he said.

Two bus loads of LU students opposed to the proposal jammed city hall during the council meeting, helping form the largest public crowd that Bentz has seen at a council meeting.

The audience included members of the Lakehead University Community Taking Action Locally group, formed to oppose the swap.
Council nixes land swap proposal

The parties involved in a controversial land swap deal that would have a parcel of land on the corner of Golf Links Rd. and Oliver Rd. used as a new high school site could be heading back to the drawing board.

City council voted 7-0 to reject the rezoning plan proposed by the Lakehead District School Board, Lakehead University and the Thunder Bay Country Club. The parties were seeking approval to start assessments on the site, which would see a large new high school built next to the university, with another portion of university grounds given to the golf course.

They had a hard sell from the beginning. Many councillors openly expressed aversion to the plan, hammering down particularly hard on the school board's acting director Ian Sutherland.

“Is it just the board that would have to accept the proposal? Or would the school board pay for that property?” asked Coun. Bill Scollie.

Sutherland seemed to have difficulty deflecting some of the councillors' concerns and questions, particularly ones regarding the advantages of having a large grade 7-12 school built on that spot. Coun. Ian Angus asked about the safety of students at a school built near a youth correctional facility and with a proposed hotel across the street.

Sutherland said it was in no way an inappropriate area to build a school, and comes within the boundaries of the city's...
Hours of opposition heard by councilors

Official Plan. He added that contrary to some opinions, the school would not contribute to what's known as "school sprawl," where a hub school draws kids from too large of an area. He said while traffic to the area would likely increase, the school system would only be using three more buses than it already was to get the kids there.

One question raised by Councillor Vickers raised murmurs and eyebrows among the large crowd in attendance. A crowd of about 150 spilled into adjacent rooms and down into the lobby.

Fred Gilbert took some heat for keeping plans under wraps until just recently, a public announcement being made only a few weeks ago. He said the decision to enter into the land swap agreement was under the jurisdiction of the university's board of governors and the nature of it couldn't be discussed in an open forum until recently.

He said LU should make full use of PACI's building should the deal come through, and that university students shouldn't be concerned about the golf course limiting their use of campus wilderness.

As anticipated, the proposal was met by a lengthy list of opponents, ranging from LU students to concerned parents of children slated to attend the new 7-12 school. Deputations went on for hours of the morning, as dozens stepped forward to voice their concerns.

LU's student union president Adam Krugger presented large binders stuffed with more than 2,000 signed petitions and letters from students, saying they have justified concerns about future accessibility of their campus.

"The university offered us nothing, no plans. One posting has been put in the paper, and that's the bare minimum," he said. "We ask that this hearing be deferred until the public has a chance to fully understand the consequences."

Student representatives spoke about detrimental effects the rezoning would have on the ecosystems around campus, which many students in programs like forestry, natural sciences and biology use extensively.

"This school promotes hands-on, natural laboratory for many courses. This gives us the edge over other schools. What edge can we offer without it?" said Angela Stern, a student of natural sciences. "Lakeshead has an obligation to the academics of students."

Rochella Hyde, a student from Toronto who planned to stay and teach in Thunder Bay, was near tears as she spoke.

"I attended a 7-12 school, and I can tell you it is not conducive to learning," she said. "They are exposed to drinking, drugs, violence and media influences that would otherwise not be exposed to at such a young age." One after the other they stepped up, parents, students. Aboriginal representatives concerned about sacred land use, environmentalists and Partners for Community Schools. They all shared a similar message, and council listened.

The group who submitted the proposal may appeal the decision to the Ontario Municipal Board, but there was no word at time of publishing whether that would happen.

In a TBTN interview, Fred Gilbert said he had his associates in the land deal will likely take a few weeks to assess the situation and decide where to go from there.

Regardless of any outcome, Ian Sutherland said PACI and Hillcrest will not continue to be used as high schools.
Land swap details on tap
THE CHRONICLE JOURNAL

Lakehead University's president plans to hand out details Monday of the controversial three-way land swap stymied by a city council decision last month.

President Fred Gilbert said Tuesday the university's board of governors has not yet decided if it will appeal the city decision to the Ontario Municipal Board.

Board members are waiting for the Lakehead District School Board to make a decision first, he said.

At the school board meeting Tuesday night, board chairman Ron Olkonen said he's still unable to say if a decision has been made to appeal council's rejection of the rezoning, because the matter is still in closed session.

On Feb. 20, city council rejected a rezoning application that would have paved the way for a new Lakehead public board high school to be built on Thunder Bay Country Club land next to the university.

In return, university land was to go to the country club, and the school board would have handed Port Arthur Collegiate Institute to the university.

Gilbert said he's still going to present the details of that deal to students on Monday at 4 p.m. in the Agora.

It's a promise he made to the students in mid-February after they held a rally to protest the land swap and stormed his office, Gilbert said.
Hot debate

Gilbert shares land deal details

BY JONATHAN WILSON
THE CHRONICLE JOURNAL

Lakehead University president Fred Gilbert vehemently defended a controversial land swap in front of a determined group of students and other opponents Monday. And he stood negotiations for the proposed three-way deal will continue, despite a zoning rejection by city council.

"Some of the critical elements are still very much under discussion," Gilbert told a crowd of about 200 people in the LU Agora. Before the council vote, Gilbert promised an angry group of protesters in February that he would present full details of the land deal, once it had become public.

Gilbert used aerial photos Monday to show the wooded university land along the McIntyre River which would have gone to the Thunder Bay Country Club for new golf course development. In return, TBCG land at the corner of Oliver Road and Golf Links Road would go to Lakehead Public Schools for a new high school, and the university would receive Port Arthur Collegiate Institute for its faculty of education.

Gilbert said the deadline to appeal council’s rejection to the Ontario Municipal Board passed last week, with no appeal filed by the Lakehead school board. But he hinted that the parties are trying to rework the deal, with less LU land to be used for the golf course.

"Let's say that this thing resurfaces, let's say there's another opportunity for a school to go on that site," Gilbert said. "If we enter into a lease arrangement with Thunder Bay Country Club, we want to find ways so that we can reduce the land that might be impacted.

The presentation was followed by a question period which quickly turned into a heated debate between Gilbert and the plan's opponents.

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LU has shot at country club property

Continued from page A1

LU student union president Adam Krupper challenged Gilbert to direct the school’s board of governors to cease all negotiations regarding a land swap for the high school.

“They have the opportunity to stop it, simply by stopping negotiations,” Krupper said.

Krupper said thousands of people have signed petitions, and he asked Gilbert to respect their wishes.

“I personally will not give you that assurance,” Gilbert responded. “The board of governors still views this proposal as being in the best interests of the university.

“For short-term gain, there’s some considerable long-term gain for this institution, and therefore I don’t share the same perspective.”

Besides acquiring PACI and sharing an outdoor track with the new high school, Gilbert revealed that the land deal would give LU first option on acquiring all golf course lands, if TBCC decided to sell it.

The golf course was put up for sale several years ago, but Gilbert said LU wasn’t in a position to buy it at that time.

Student Jeff Moore asked Gilbert why LU doesn’t just buy PACI when it closes in 2007.

“Why would we need this contract in order to acquire it?” Moore asked.

Gilbert said the university doesn’t have the money to buy PACI, adding there’s no guarantee LU could buy it at fair market value.

Student Richella Hyde challenged Gilbert to be a “responsible and ethical educator” and see the potential negative aspects of having a high school next to a university.

“It just doesn’t seem logical to me,” said Hyde. “You have the opportunity to be a role model.”

Lakehead University student union president Adam Krupper, seen walking a trail on a site students want to preserve, encouraged the university Monday to end all talk about a proposed land swap.

Gilbert said the decision of where to locate the high school is up to the school board, and not LU.

Later, Gilbert said he thought it would be a good spot for a high school.

“Personally? Yeah. It’s probably as good a location as you’re going to find.”

Several student speakers chastised Gilbert for not releasing information about the planned deal before the city council meeting in February.

Kelly Von Bergan said they were forced to peter city planners and local contractors for information.

“We were scrumming for some kind of facts and you’re not presenting them to us,” she said.

“That’s why there are so many people here who are upset.”

Gilbert maintained that in-camera discussions by the board of governors have to remain confidential.

“It was inappropriate to reveal many of the details because in fact we had not entered into any legally binding arrangements at that time.”

Von Bergan later got into a heated exchange with Gilbert when she asked if the land deal would represent the student body.

“They’re predominantly older white men. They’re the rich elite of Thunder Bay,” she said. “Having a couple of men in suits making decisions for us in-camera is not proper consultation.

“You’re wrong,” Gilbert retorted, pointing out the board has student, aboriginal, faculty and alumni representatives, and “at least one-third” are female.

Other students thanked Gilbert for the opportunity to present their views. But one of those students said she felt the land deal was “hostile act” because of the lack of student consultation.
School board mum on land deal

BY SARAH ELIZABETH BROWN
THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL

Lakehead District School Board chairman Ron Oikonen says he can’t discuss the university’s president remarks about another go at a controversial land swap, but he does say no decisions have been made.

University president Fred Gilbert outlined the details Monday of a three-way land swap stymied by city council when it voted against rezoning the land.

“Let’s say that this thing resurfaces, let’s say there’s another opportunity for a school to go on that site,” said Gilbert. “If we enter into a lease arrangement with Thunder Bay Country Club, we want to find ways so that we can reduce the land that might be impacted.”

The school board did not appeal council’s decision to the Ontario Municipal Board.

The deal would have seen the school board build a high school on country club land; the country club receive university land for its golf course; and LU receive Port Arthur Collegiate Institute which is slated for closure.

The school board hasn’t filed any new zoning applications, a city hall planner said Tuesday.

Oikonen said board discussions about a new high school are still in closed session.

Board bylaws prohibit trustees from speaking publicly about property matters while they’re still in the in-camera stage.

“We never would have got started this year anyway,” said Oikonen.

Even if city council had approved the rezoning application for Thunder Bay Country Club land at the corner of Golf Links Road and Oliver Road for a high school, “the people who were against it would have gone to the OMB, I’m sure. That would have delayed it another few months,” Oikonen said.

“What’s going to happen in the future — I’m not really sure.”

If everything had gone according to plan, the board had envisioned opening a new school in September 2007 after both PACI and Hillcrest High School were closed.

The students would move to the new school, which would have about 1,100 students.

For the 2006-07 school year, it’s last. PACI will be down to grades 10 through 12. By the 2007-08 school year, remaining students will have been shifted to Hillcrest.

Hillcrest and PACI are among the latest batch closed by the school board, but Hillcrest will operate until a new high school is built, Oikonen said.

University students protested the deal and lack of consultation.

“He was probably in the same boat we were,” said Oikonen of Gilbert.

“When you have things in-camera, you’re discussing property deals and you can’t really discuss them (publicly).”

Oikonen questions whether the students understood the legalities preventing Gilbert from sharing details while negotiations were going on, and suggested “it was a bit unfair” of them to expect the details earlier.

“It seems like you’re holding things back, but that’s just the way the rules are,” Oikonen said.

He praised Gilbert for “taking the flak.”

“University students can sometimes be hard to tangle with,” Oikonen said.
Signs of life for PACI

LU land swap discussed

BY SARAH ELIZABETH BROWN
THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL

Port Arthur Collegiate Institute may continue on as a school, but for university students.

Lakehead University and the Lakehead District School Board are in discussions to swap the venerable high school for a 16-acre piece of land on the university's south-east corner, close to Riverdale Drive.

The university is eyeing the site to house its "considerably cramped" education faculty, fine arts program or possibly a new law school.

"Beautiful building too — it would be a shame to see it become derelict."

Fred Gilbert
Lakehead University president

In return, the university land could be home to a high school, among other possible uses, director of education Terry Ellwood said Thursday.

The education faculty has run out of space for offices and classrooms in the Bora Laskin Building, said university president Fred Gilbert.

The entire education faculty would not likely move to PACI, but some parts of the professional, one-year teaching program might move downtown, though that's up to the faculty, said Gilbert.

Visual arts and music departments have said they're interested in PACI, and athletics could use the high school's gym.

"If the law school comes to fruition, that would be a lovely place for it," he added.

So far the offer is on the table and discussions are in the early stages, Gilbert said.

"We think that it's a nice opportunity to ensure that PACI is a good, productive piece of property in a key part of the city," he said.

"Beautiful building too — it would be a shame to see it become derelict."

Lakehead University Students' Union president Richard Longtin said Thursday that in his mind, PACI has always looked like a law school should.

Added Ellwood: "All you've got to do is get a little more ivy growing up the walls."

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Land swap 2 differs from original plan

Unlike a proposed three-way land swap involving the board, university and Thunder Bay Country Club that died in February 2006 after city council refused a rezoning request needed to make the deal happen, the Lakehead University Student Union is cautiously optimistic about the latest idea.

The school board was looking to build a high school with a capacity of about 1,100 students, approximately the same size or smaller than its current high schools.

Gilbert notified the student union about the discussions a week ago, said Longtin.

"Obviously with the result of the last situation, I wouldn't imagine that they would be so secretive this time around, that they would try to get students on board from the very beginning," Longtin said.

Some university students and residents loudly opposed the previous three-party swap because the land in question was next to student residences and included the McIntyre River, causing environmental concerns and fears students' outdoor laboratory would be destroyed.

Aboriginal students' sweat lodge was also on the land in question.

Those aren't concerns with the latest plan, said Longtin.

He and Gilbert describe the 16 acres under discussion as unused scrub. The property doesn't include wetlands or streams.

As well, said Longtin, the concern that university students housed at PACI would be cut off from the main campus isn't as acute since a cheap bus pass for all university students has been approved by the city.

There will be in camera discussions when property details come up, but the public should know discussions have started, said Ellwood.

"We certainly recognize that we need to be transparent with our school and Lakehead U communities," he said.

"It's about making sure people know where we're going.

The 16-acre property is zoned major

Lakehead University president sits outside PACI on Thursday.

institutional, so re-zoning would be unnecessary, said Ellwood.

The board still has to satisfy questions about services like sewer and water.

"From our perspective, this piece of property is something that could be for future use, including the possibility of a new high school," he said. "It could include other things as well.

"If we go ahead with a new high school, this is one of the locations that we would be looking at."

This land-swap proposal is preferable because it doesn't involve land that students use, said Longtin.

The only reservation for the student union is putting a high school so close to university residences, he said. Having young teens mixing with university-age students and more people near the university student residences were two concerns in early 2006.

But there are many positives this time around, he said, from more space for cramped faculties to more people downtown spending money in local businesses.
Land swap on again

EDUCATION
By Laith Dunick – TB Source

A proposed land-for-building swap between Lakehead University and the Lakehead District School Board makes a lot more sense in light of last Friday's announcement allocating $266.6 million of provincial money for a new high school.

Lakehead University president Fred Gilbert said his institution proposed the transfer of 16.5 acres of university land, located at the southeastern corner of the campus near Riverside Drive, in exchange for the soon-to-be-vacated Port Arthur Collegiate Institute.

Gilbert said there are a number of ways the university could use the school, which was built in 1909.

"Some of the immediate possibilities are related to the faculty of education, which has real space issues that aren't possible to treat in their current home in the Bora Laskin building," said Gilbert.

Gilbert also said it could be a possible home for a proposed Lakehead law school, should the university receive accreditation in the future.

Plan in place

Terry Elwood, director of education for the school board, said he and the trustees want to ensure PACI is put to good use now that its high-school days are over.

"I think it's always been a priority for the trustees to ensure whatever happens to PACI once it closes as a high school is to ensure it has an honourable and conforming use in the school community," Elwood said.

"We did not want to have a situation where the building would be closed and empty for any length of time."

Elwood said the board will hold discussions over the next few months, and that a final decision should come shortly afterward, adding Lakehead University was on a list of preferred clients the board had to offer the property to when putting it on the market.

The proposal was met with guarded approval from the university's student body president. Two years ago, when Thunder Bay Country Club was in the mix, Lakehead University Student Union opposed the deal because they felt the land involved, adjacent to the golf course, was too valuable to give away.

Dangers exist

Richard Longtin said while he agrees with the choice of land to trade away, he would have a hard time supporting the deal if the school board planned to build a high school on the property.

"It's just not appropriate to have high-school students mixing with university students," he said.

Elwood said the Lakehead site remains on the list of possible locations, but that nothing has been decided.

Jennifer Morrison, the LUSU vice-president of student issues, said the good and bad will have to be considered before they give the deal their stamp of approval.

"There is the opportunity to create some excellent instructional space for our faculty of education students. However, that has to be weighed against removing them from the Oliver Road campus, which is really the heart of university life," Morrison said.
School board, LU land talks continue

THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL

Talks about a swap involving the closed Port Arthur Collegiate are still on between Lakehead University and the public school board, the university president says.

The Lakehead District School Board announced Wednesday that it intends to demolish the recently-closed Balsam Street Public School and build a new high school on the six-acre property.

In June, days before the provincial government announced $36.6 million for a new public high school, the board and university announced they were in early talks about trading PACI for a 16-acre piece of land on the university's southeast corner, close to Riverside Drive.

Those talks are still on, Lakehead University president Fred Gilbert said Thursday.

"Absolutely, it was never contingent on that site being used for a high school," said Gilbert.

Lakehead is working toward getting a law school at the university, with a hoped-for opening date of 2009.

The application is currently with a senate committee for revisions and further detail about curriculum, he said. That information should be ready to go back to the law society in late September or early October, Gilbert said.

The university's education, music and visual arts programs have all expressed interest in relocating to PACI.