

Members weigh options on prison; Possible locations for jail site on reserve won't be reviewed until next week

Penticton Indian Band members packed their community hall to talk about the proposed Okanagan prison with B.C. Corrections staff on Wednesday night.

However, possible locations for a correctional facility on the reserve won't be reviewed until another meeting next week.

Chief Jonathan Kruger said Thursday although the four-hour forum went extremely well, many band members didn't feel comfortable discussing the pros and cons of potential prison sites on the reserve in front of the Ministry of Solicitor General staff.

That will likely occur at another meeting scheduled for next Wednesday evening, also at the band hall at 7 p.m.

"The council and the community members will probably come up with some ideas on where this could be," he said. "We have a couple of sites in mind, but we need to discuss it more." Kruger said it appeared that band members attending this week's information meeting were roughly split as to whether or not the band should proceed with a submission on the prison.

He emphasized even if the Penticton band makes a submission, it will likely be a long time before the government makes a final decision.

The province has set a deadline of April 1 to hear from Okanagan communities interested in locating a correctional facility in their area. The medium security prison would have room for more than 700 inmates.

Kruger said the Penticton band members are aware of the time line, but want to hold another meeting next week to discuss the matter internally.

"I believe that we will be talking about a mandate to move forward and talking about locations," he said.

"We're looking for a mandate to move forward – or not." The chief said the atmosphere at Wednesday's meeting was very respectful. He noted several younger band members also asked some key questions.

Similar to meetings in Summerland and Penticton earlier this week, B.C. Corrections staff outlined details on the prison proposal and answered questions from those attending.

"The meeting went really well. The community members asked some awesome questions," he said.

"It gives me a lot of confidence that our community is really strong and we're going in a good direction." Wednesday's forum was closed to the media, as will be the session next week.