

The Ontario government says it is not ignoring the concerns of Indigenous people about Barrie's Allandale Station land, and its status as a Native burial ground.

Jeff Costen, spokesman for Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport Eleanor McMahon, said this week the Indigenous people are involved in archaeological work being done at Lakeshore Drive and Tiffin Street.

"Indigenous engagement is absolutely critical for this process and the Huron-Wendat First Nation and the Chippewas of Rama have been invited to participate in the archaeological fieldwork," he said.

"The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport is currently reviewing earlier archaeology reports related to the Allandale site. Upon completion of this review, the reports will be provided to the Registrar of Cemeteries."

It will declare the site to be one of three things - an Aboriginal Peoples burial ground, a burial ground or an irregular burial site.

This declaration will be based on archaeological assessment reports that will be provided to the Registrar, once the ministry reviews and accepts them. Next steps will be determined once the declaration is made.

But Keith Doxsee, governor of area 7 of the Ontario Coalition of Indigenous People, which includes Barrie, said his questions haven't been answered.

"None of the government agencies are responsive ... nobody seems to be interested in providing information, so whatever we find is through our own efforts and what we find it doesn't look particularly good," he said.

"So you have to ask the question: what else is there that we don't know about? That hasn't been disclosed to us.

"What we do know is not good," Doxsee said.

He has asked for a public inquiry or a criminal investigation to determine if an Indigenous burial site was desecrated at the city-owned Allandale Station property.

But Costen said the Ontario government has a comprehensive set of rules and processes in place to ensure that any discovery of human remains is addressed appropriately and respectfully.

"Specifically, the Funeral, Burial and Cremation Services Act, 2002 legislates that any person who knowingly discovers a burial site should immediately notify the police or coroner," he said.

"In the case of Allandale Station, it's important to note that there is currently a development moratorium on the site pending the completion of an investigation order by the Registrar of Cemeteries," Costen said. "The ministry has been notified by a licensed archaeologist that they will be completing an archaeological assessment of the Allandale Station lands for the City of Barrie in order to address concerns raised by the Huron-Wendat Nation and the Chippewas of Rama First Nation."

The City of Barrie has commissioned an independent archeological review of the Allandale Station property to help determine its status. The review is not yet finished.

AECOM is doing a full archaeology assessment of the Allandale Train Station site, including stage 1, 2 and 3 studies. Pending results of the studies, a stage 4 assessment will be conducted. The stage 1 assessment has been received by the city in draft form and is under review. The stage 2 assessment started in the beginning of May. This stage includes hand-digging 275 test pits on the site. The stage 3 assessment has been completed and the city is awaiting the report.

Nonetheless, Doxsee said his group isn't getting the answers it needs, or wants.

"Whenever we raise issues about human remains we get the cone of silence. Nobody responds. No one gives us any answers," he said. "How are we supposed to get an understanding, how are we supposed to reconcile indigenous peoples' interests with anything if they won't even exchange information, comment or even notify?"

A large portion of the Allandale Station land was the subject of a standard archeological assessment in 2000-2001, including an excavation. City officials said it was OK'd by the Ontario Ministry of Culture.

Another assessment in 2009 indicated the property might contain further archeologically significant artifacts. Historian Andrew Hunter had documented in 1907, and the city was aware of, a large burial of bones, several smaller ones and that burial sites had been discovered within the property in the 1800s.

During restoration of the Allandale Station buildings in July 2011, human remains were discovered in a crawl space. An archeological assessment took place. It concluded no archeological resources of potential heritage value or interest were found and there was no evidence of a formal grave or intentional burial.

The Ontario Coalition of Indigneous Peoples says it represents the rights and interests of Métis, status and non-status Indians living off-reserve in Ontario. It is an affiliate of the Indigenous Peoples' Assembly of Canada, formerly known as the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, and previously as the Native Council of Canada. Doxsee says his coalition represents about 73% of Ontario's Indigenous population.

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