

# Algonquin agrees to sell Rideau site

## College refuses to reveal details

BY PAULINE TAM

Algonquin College has signed a conditional agreement to sell its vacated campus by the Rideau River, amid revelations about possible health risks to former employees at the site.

The college signed an agreement with an undisclosed buyer last month, just weeks after the union representing Algonquin's teaching staff received a letter from public health officials dismissing the union's concerns about potential cancer-related health hazards at the campus.

Because the sales agreement is tied up in zoning proposals before the city, the deal could take as long as nine months to close. Until then, the college will not disclose the terms of the sale

or the buyer's identity.

"The offer that we have signed is within reason of what we were hoping for," says John Hamilton, the college's vice-president of finance and administration.

The 6.2-hectare property, which reportedly had an asking price of \$9 million, has been on the market for nearly two years. It was vacated last year after the college transferred the 2,000 students attending classes at the Rideau campus to the college's main campus on Woodroffe Avenue.

Film crews have since rented some of the five buildings on the property and converted them into production studios.

The campus is on Lees Avenue at the junction of an OC Transpo station, a ramp to the Queensway and the Rideau River. Its location — at a time when downtown land is scarce and de-

mand is high — makes it one of the most desirable properties on the market within the city core.

At one point, the University of Ottawa expressed interest in the property, but it backed away after environmental reports suggested the land needed to be cleaned up.

Indeed, the property, which had been a city landfill before Algonquin began building there in the 1950s, has a history that may limit what a new owner does with the site.

Contaminated ground water was discovered in the area in 1986 when coal tar leaked into the nearby Rideau River. The problem was traced to an underground storage tank on property across the street from the campus.

The former region of Ottawa-Carleton installed a treatment system designed to pump out ground water and clean it over

time. Tests show there is no more contamination flowing into the Rideau River.

But the union representing Algonquin's teaching staff has repeatedly raised concerns that the Rideau campus may have posed a health risk to employees who worked there.

During the 1990s, the union began looking into cases of illness among staff. It renewed its efforts earlier this year after learning that a retired professor who taught at the site died of cancer. His death was the fifth among faculty members who had developed cancer over the past five years.

Public health officials have twice examined data on the known cases of cancer among workers at the campus. Both times, they found no indication that the illnesses were linked to exposure to chemicals at the site.