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## **Gatineau offers \$70,000 per condemned house**

Owners of houses threatened by landslide must agree not to sue city in exchange for cash

### **Laura Stone**

The Ottawa Citizen

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The City of Gatineau voted last night to give four homeowners permanently displaced by the threat of a landslide as much as \$70,000 each in compensation.

The money, if accepted, would come with certain conditions, including the loss of the homeowners' right to hold the city legally responsible.

Six homes on Lafrance Street in Gatineau were evacuated recently after a crack developed in a hillside behind the buildings, posing the risk of a landslide. The area is layered with unstable leda clay that appears to have loosened because of this year's hard winter.

Alain d'Entremont, the chief of public relations for the city, said this was all the city could offer the homeowners. The Quebec Ministry of Security is giving these families \$100,000 each. This was announced on Saturday.

"Even our \$70,000 on top of the \$100,000 will not cover all the costs. But we hope that this will help them to recover their home," he admitted.

"It's not enough," says Richard Viau, one of the homeowners. "I don't know what we will do."

Gatineau Mayor Marc Bureau said the city will try to lower the cost of private lots for the homeowners to move their homes to, but added that the law authorizing the provincial compensation prohibits them from providing land to the homeowners for free.

"We cannot go in our lot ourselves. How come somebody else can go and work on it?" said Mr. Viau, when told of the city's plan to move the houses.

The city and provincial compensation offer does not include the owner of the two houses on Lafrance Street that were being rented. Jean Costa also has 30 more lots to sell in the area. He said he's out about \$600,000 if he does not get money for the two homes.

"We're meeting with the lawyers Thursday morning," he said. "The street's not dead yet."

New zoning restrictions, which were announced yesterday, make it illegal to build or perform any construction on high-risk land in this part of Gatineau, unless it is for public safety reasons. The restrictions will be in effect for three to six months. The city has hired a team of engineers to inspect the area.

This means that unless the homeowners want to demolish their homes, they will have to wait at least three months to move their houses to new lots.

Mr. d'Entremont said the process of moving and buying new lots could cost upwards of \$150,000 for each of the four buildings.

It's a price that Louise Poirier, a city councillor, said is too high for the residents to pay.

She called on the provincial government to change their emergency relief sum to \$140,000, which she said hasn't been altered in 20 years.

"I think we should upgrade this money," she said.

Pierre Phillion, another councillor, said it's not the province's or the city's fault, because they performed a geo-technical study.

"The land, they said that you could build houses there, but that was wrong, I guess," he said.

Fondex Shermont, the engineering company that approved some of the Lafrance Street lots, did not respond to interview requests.

In the meantime, residents will receive money from the Quebec government to cover their expenses.

Mr. d'Entremont said a family of four will receive \$40 a day, which adds up to about \$1,200 a month.

The Red Cross announced yesterday that they would pay for the homeowners' hotels until May 1.

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