

70 attend peaceful protest recently at former Volk Airport

By Wendy Gabrek

Members of Tottenham Citizens for Clean Drinking Water recently held a peaceful protest, causally called "Stop Airport Fill, Protect our Water," at the site of the former Volk Airport.

Lining the north side of Highway 9, about 70 people, including residents from Tecumseth Pines, campaigning politicians and people from the three bordering municipalities (Dufferin, Caledon and New Tecumseth), participated in a protest against what they are calling an "unregulated fill operation" and "not the construction of an airport."

Angry about the clear-cutting of hundreds of trees, the multitude of trucks entering and exiting the site daily, the lack of regulation concerning the quality of fill being placed at the site and the duration of the "never-ending" fill operation (with no airport in sight), protesters waived signs as passerby's honked their horns in approval.

While local and national media outlets gathered footage, construction site managers filmed protesters from inside the property boundary.

A post-protest statement released by event organizers declared the event a success, stating, "We came together to make a point, (united by) a common bond " we care about our water, our air and we are all fed up with the shenanigans going on (at the former Volk Airport)."

Organizers were also pleased that they were able to hit the owners of the site where it matters most " in the pocketbook, as trucks carrying fill were directed away (presumably for the safety of the protesters and to avoid the cameras) during the protest.

In a letter to New Tecumseth Ward 6 Councillor Richard Norcross, Tecumseth Pines resident David Francis wrote, "The Town's (New Tecumseth) position on the monitoring the fill operation at Tottenham Airport, so we have been told, is to rely on the Ministry of the Environment to monitor the site. Our Freedom of Information request has found that the MOE made one inspection in June 2012. If you call that looking after the interests of homeowners who draw their drinking water from wells, it is disgraceful.

"Furthermore, the Town is obligated to protect the Oak Ridges Moraine, under the Oak Ridges Moraine Act, yet not only have thousands of truck loads of untested fill been dumped onto the Oak Ridges Moraine, the Airport operators have clear cut hundreds of trees to be sold to logging companies, and the Town turns a blind eye to this rape of the Moraine."

Jesseca Dudun, Green party candidate for Simcoe-Grey in the provincial election, was on hand for the demonstration, and joined the circulating e-mail conversation, raising issues with the quality of fill that she said has been dumped on the site for the last 15 years. "The airfield has accepted fill for the past 15 years and has stepped up the intake over the last two years," she stated. "The story is to improve the airfield but plans for the runways are not clearly defined or shared.

"This airfield is bringing in as much fill as they want without a permit," she added, pointing out that as a federally-regulated operation, and airport is not accountable to municipalities.

Dudun, who also declared last Tuesday's peaceful protest a success, made note of an important, and possibly overlooked, site occurrence.

Schomberg resident Greg Locke, a member of the group Concerned Citizens of King Township, had this to say following the event: "We're offended by the Town of New Tecumseth council's refusal to enforce their own landfill bylaw."

He added this issue involves prime land on the Oak Ridges Moraine, and that the group is very concerned with the apparent lack of enforcement there.

"If this isn't a clear example where enforcement is needed, I don't know which is," he added. "Contaminated fill will ruin the wells of surrounding residents and communities downstream that the underlying aquifers feed."

The group Tottenham Citizens for Clean Drinking Water plan to host future protests at the site, demanding attention for a problem that they say will cause permanent environmental issues at the site, for the Moraine, and for private properties surrounding the airport.