

CAMP calling for EA on Melville Pit proposal

By Bill Rea

The Province is being asked to help in the fight against the Melville Pit.

About 30 people were on hand for the latest meeting last Wednesday of Citizens Against the Melville Pit (CAMP), and among other things, they were asked to help circulate a letter, addressed to Environment Minister Jim Bradley, requesting an environmental assessment (EA) for the proposal.

Caledon council, in December, voted to support the application of Olympia Sand and Gravel Ltd. to recognize the roughly 291 acres at Lots 27 and 28, Concession 2 in west Caledon (just north of Melville) for extraction. The move came after councillors heard from more than a dozen delegations voicing opposition to the proposal.

Councillor Doug Beffort was the only one to oppose the motion. He stated at the time the data was incomplete, especially concerning water issues.

Sam Asher, who chaired last week's meeting, which was held in Alton, said foes of the pit have been very pleased with the support they have been getting so far. There were two town hall meetings, held in Orangeville and Alton late in February. "It was very successful," she said.

But she also said there a lot of people in the area who are not aware of the campaign in opposition to the pit, or even the pit itself. There have also been meetings between CAMP and the Town of Orangeville. Asher said Orangeville Mayor Rob Adams has expressed concern that his municipality wouldn't be getting levies from the development, even though trucks are going to be using the Orangeville Bypass.

CAMP has already indicated it plans to appeal the Town's approval to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), and Asher observed that officials in Orangeville have not shown interest in being party to that, although there is dialogue.

Asher commented that water is a key issue, both with Orangeville and Peel Region, and that involves both quantity and quality. One man pointed out water has been an issue with golf courses going into the area, adding that large water-consuming operations eventually have an impact on the supply.

There were also questions about who would be responsible if locals wells are impacted from the pit.

One man charged he's not against operations like this, but argued they belong in northern Ontario.

Those at the meeting were urged to help circulate a petition, addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. The body of the document stated the proposal would turn hundreds of acres of farmland and woodlots into an industrial site. It also pointed out the pit will close to schools and residential areas, endangering water supplies, polluting air and increasing truck traffic.

"We demand that the Province of Ontario support its citizens and stop the Melville pit," it concluded.

The letter to Bradley, which CAMP is asking people to sign, expressed concerns that regulations in place offer sufficient protection. "I do not believe that the Aggregate Resources Act protects the environment," the letter read. "I am also concerned that the Ministry of Natural Resources does not have the personnel or the interest in ensuring that its many interests in ecology, including woodlands, endangered species and significant wildlife, merit equal protection when aggregate resources are involved."

The letter went on to request the EA "to ensure there is appropriate provincial review and scrutiny of this proposal before its planning goes any further."

As well, the letter addressed issues of water, stating Olympia has not done any pump tests to ensure it's available; aggregate recycling, wondering how it would be regulated on site; and air pollution from the fine dust particles that would be released in the air.

CAMP member Paul Bunt pointed out this property sits in the one area of the Credit River watershed in which water quantity is an issue.

He also said calls like this for an EA aren't always successful, but they were a couple of years ago with the opposition to the proposed massive operation in Melancthon. A lot of calls for an EA this time could do some good.

He also stressed that just having the people at the meeting send out letters wouldn't cut it.

"Tonight is the start of a campaign across the community," he declared. "We need to flood the Minister of the Environment with these letters."

Asher also said there had been a meeting with CAMP and Credit Valley Conservation (CVC) staff earlier in the week. Asher reported it was a very positive session, adding they were happy to hear CAMP's position. She also said she spoke as a concerned resident who has supported CVC for years, and she was concerned the conservation authority had not received more input. "This is quite huge," she observed.

She also said CVC was clear that they have not regulatory authority over aggregate applications. They can comment, and Asher said she has not yet seen their comments.

She also stressed the need to reach out to local politicians. As well, the group needs to raise money to hire experts.

“We need to do that as a community,” she said. As well, she pointed to the need for volunteers.

“Our campaign is ramping up,” she said. “We’re on a really positive track right now.”