

Council hears about effort to protect water and land

By Nick Fernandes

Caledon council received a visit recently from Food and Water First (FWF), an advocacy group with the mission to lobby for the protection of Ontario's farmable land and natural water sources.

In particular, they stand in opposition to the various quarry projects attempting to open shop in Caledon and other municipalities. To this end, FWF approached council with a simple request for help.

Shirley Boxem, a representative for FWF, gave council a rundown of their operations, highlighting the role they played in stopping the construction of the Highland Mega Quarry, which according to FWF would have used up some of Ontario's rare Class 1 farmland.

FWF helped stop the quarry by building up a grassroots resistance within communities, organizing events to raise awareness and letting the government know that there were a substantial number of citizens opposing aggregate developments.

"When you create a long enough parade, a leader will want to get in the front of it," she said, adding the movement to stop the mega quarry eventually contributed to the local government rejecting the application.

In light of the controversy surrounding the Melville pit in Caledon, FWF presented council with a new rezoning plan for consideration. It's a plan that will take advantage of existing water and farmland protection laws to keep valuable land safe from quarrying.

"First thing I'd like to thank is for you saying what you're asking council for," said Councillor Doug Beffort, although he made it clear that council has legislative "handcuffs" on. "If you ask us to turn it down, we go to the (Ontario) Municipal Board and there will be a big fight. What are you doing to push the government?"

"We believe it was the formation of a critical mass," said Boxem.

Councillor Allan Thompson was somewhat skeptical of the movement, wondering whether the citizens involved with FWF were prepared to pay for the more expensive local food to support the use of local farmland. Boxem observed that often people who do not wish to pay such prices for food will often spend similar prices for other things. "It's about people's expectations, and what they believe they deserve to pay for things," she said.

Council was generally supportive of the delegation, who will likely go on to begin building an opposition base to more quarries and aggregate mining in Caledon and Ontario.