

Council showed a 'closed mind' in dealing with Olympia pit

Re: Caledon council approval of the Olympia gravel pit

I have been involved in the evolution of mineral aggregate policy in the Town of Caledon since the first Official Plan in 1979 and the first Provincial Policy Statement.

A constant observation of the gravel strip mining industry has been the lack of any social compact with the host community. Profit is the metric of the industry. There has been and continues to be no short or long-term benefit to the host community or natural environment of a gravel strip mine. Benefits accrue to the strip mine owners and the larger GTA economy, not affected landowners who experience the loss of the enjoyment and use of their lands, threats to their safety by heavy truck traffic and health impacts.

A second constant observation is the lack of any identifiable oversight of individual strip mine operations by the Ministry of Natural Resources. References to Aggregate Resource Act licences and site plans serve a useful rhetorical crutch at approval stages to support massive, permanent changes to the Caledon landscape and communities without any termination date for mining activities.

The approval of the Olympia gravel pit, along with watching Caledon council over the last eight years has made me raise, in different ways, the following acute questions:

To whom is the Town of Caledon responsible?

Who is the Town supposed to represent?

And who/what is it supposed to protect residents from?

The base assumption of the current council is they are best qualified to know what is best for Caledon residents, even when the affected Caledon residents think and say differently. The implied mantra of council to its residents is 'trust us and move on; nothing to see here.'

And if anyone dares to speak up and ask questions, they are deemed to oppose council and its staff and summarily demonized as 'grandstanders,' etc. Council members assume their powers on the basis that they are best qualified to know what's best for the public, even when the public thinks differently and provides factual backup.

During the Dec. 9 council meeting, the Caledon resident delegations were professional, their numbers in attendance were high, overflowing to the cafeteria, and they took the high road. Council failed to ask key questions of the proponents and staff regarding the strip mine impacts and failed to reflect in any substantial way, the residents. Overall, council exhibited a closed mind as they voted to approve the new strip mine. What has become clear by the consistent behaviour of Caledon council is a feeling that local politics, even after courteous, professional delegations by residents, is not responding to resident's needs in terms of the enjoyment and use of their lands, threats to their safety by heavy truck traffic and health impacts.

The consequences of this are toxic to the community.

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