

Foes of the Melville pit proposal getting ready for OMB

By Bill Rea

Citizens Against the Melville Pit (CAMP) are still active, getting ready to take their case to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), for a hearing scheduled to start in July.

CAMP Chair Mary Haslett said there was a town hall meeting last Sunday, attended by about 40 people.

"The group is very much prepared now for the hearing that's coming up," she said.

Caledon council, in December 2013, 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. The property is less than a kilometer south of the municipal boundary with Orangeville. Haslett said the lands have been redesignated as prime agricultural, but she added that's not going to make much difference at OMB.

"The pit will go in, no matter what, if they're successful," she observed, adding aggregate law overrules agricultural law.

CAMP's main effort at this stage is to raise awareness of the effort, as well as money to help finance it. They have been able to get help in-kind. For example, she said Ecojustice is offering its services pro-bono.

Haslett said the matter has been narrowed to two basic issues; water and the presence of the Jefferson Salamander.

"Water is pretty key," she commented, adding if the company gets a permit to take water, it will amount to close to 11 million litres per week.

The mining operation is slated to take place above the water table, but there are concerns the quality of the aggregate material is so low, the applicant will want to wash it on site. There are also concerns for the impacts on the water supply that services Orangeville. CAMP has stated two of the 12 wells servicing Orangeville are just west of the site. The Town has a Tier 3 water budget, and areas where there are significant threats to groundwater quantity have been identified.

"Will the OMB allow this pit, knowing full well the huge impact this pit is going to have on water in Orangeville?" Haslett asked.

Regarding the Jefferson salamander, she said as a species, it's endangered and protected.

"We know that they exist in our area," she said, adding there are teams of volunteers out surveying the population.

She also said the Ministry of Natural Resources has maps that indicate there are Jefferson Salamanders in a corridor running from Mono Cliffs to Inglewood.

"It really is a connection that deserves protection," she said.

The next step, according to Haslett, is to get ready for the OMB hearing, which means working with experts CAMP has lined up and raising money.

The fundraising target, she said, is \$65,000, and she stressed the importance of reaching that. There are some events being planned, including some sort of social.

She added there are about 20 local residents who are getting ready to make submissions to OMB.

"We're feeling very positive that it's going to work, absolutely," Haslett declared. "We've got two very key issues, and they're hot issues that need to be addressed very fully at the OMB."

For more information on the effort, go to www.stopthemelvillepit.com