

In response to the 'secret' aggregate summit in Bolton

Written by Norm Chessman

I write to express my concerns and disappointment with the April 18th article: Residents protest 'secret' aggregate summit in Bolton. Simply put, the article is misleading and factually incorrect.

The article provided a platform for one community group, the Palgrave Residents Association, to deliver a highly prejudicial position to your readers.

Caledon resident Cheryl Connors is quoted as claiming, 'the aggregate industry wants to be exempt from virtually every single piece of environmental legislation, to be allowed to extract anywhere, not have to abide by Oak Ridges Moraine and Niagara Escarpment legislation.' Ms. Connors' allegations are untrue.

In reality, Ontario's aggregate industry is one of the province's most heavily governed industries. Twenty-five different pieces of legislation and literally dozens of regulations determine where, when and how stone, sand and gravel (aggregate) is extracted. And that's a good thing. Our industry wants to work in partnership with communities, to bring the aggregate that we all use (including Ms. Connors) every single day of our lives - to where it's needed in the most environmentally and economically way possible.

In fact, working in conjunction with mayors from the Top Aggregate Producing Municipalities of Ontario (TAPMO), the industry has been lobbying for years for a higher aggregate levy to increase the government's spending on enforcement officers across the province and provide more money for municipal infrastructure. We are not seeking to be exempt from legislation, but we are seeking a regulatory framework that is responsible, that protects the environment, and allows the industry to produce the aggregate that will be needed for future growth.

How much are we growing? The Greater Golden Horseshoe area is expected to grow by nearly 4 million people by the year 2041. To build the roads, schools, transit, sewage, hockey arenas and housing to support that growth will require approximately 4 billion tonnes of aggregate. It has to come from somewhere. And the reality is that the closer it can be sourced to where it's needed, the better it is for society and for the environment. Closer means cleaner. Fewer truck trips, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and less cost.

This might not be a message that everyone likes to hear. In fact, community groups engage in strong environmental lobbying and have been successful over the past two decades in influencing public policy decisions so that it has become more difficult for aggregate producers to operate close to where the product is needed. The irony is, that's a bad thing for the environment and all Ontarians.

In your story, Ms. Connors claims that she was 'able to obtain a copy of an OSSGA white paper' from which she is quoted as highlighting a number of recommendations. First, this sounds as if obtaining a copy of the document submitted to the Ontario government is problematic. It is not. It appears on the OSSGA website for all interested Ontarians to read and was made widely available to ministry officials, other stakeholders and disseminated through social media when it was released. Secondly, her attacks on the recommendations are completely without merit and leave readers with a distorted view. The industry's recommendations regarding access to aggregates within municipal road allowances for example, is all about maximizing the extraction of aggregate in an area that is already disturbed so that it is not wasted. The environmentally smart thing to do.

The industry stands behind the recommendations we have made to government. We believe they strongly and accurately reflect the responsible environmental and economic choices required to deliver a product to market (that we all need) in the safest and most environmentally-conscious way possible.

Finally, although I do not speak on behalf of the Ontario Government, it is true the new government did organize a day to have

detailed discussions with aggregate producers, hydrogeologists, air and noise specialists, ecologists, First Nations, conservation authorities and the mayors of some of Ontario's top aggregate producing municipalities to better understand these concerns and to work together to find a balance to these complex issues. Contrary to the impression given in your article, this meeting was far from ?secret.? In fact, it was well communicated, which is how Ms. Connors became aware of the event.

Stone, sand and gravel are scarce natural resources that we all use every day to live our lives. We need to work together to craft public policy decisions that build Ontario. We look forward to working with our stakeholders and the communities in which we do business to make that happen.