

Lafarge gets approval for expanded operation

By Bill Rea

Caledon Council has given its approval to expanding Lafarge Canada Inc.'s gravel operation near Caledon village into the Limebeer property, but not without opposition.

Former councillor Ian Sinclair voiced his concerns over the move before Council before the final vote was taken, and Councillor Barb Shaughnessy spent considerable time making her views known.

The staff report, which had gone before councillors early in February, pointed out the lands in question are at the southeast corner of Charleston Sideroad and McLaren Road. The Limebeer Pit will see an extraction area of approximately 32 hectares (79 acres).

Extraction would occur to a maximum depth remaining above, but within 1.5 metres of the water table, the staff report said.

There is an estimated total aggregate reserve of 5.2 million tonnes available within the proposed extraction limits and the applicant anticipates a 10 to 12 year operational lifespan, pending market demand and other factors

Representatives with the Green Lake Property Owners Association voiced their support for what Lafarge had proposed.

Association member Richard Barnett had addressed councillors, stating they were asked to enter into talks over the proposal about eight years ago. People around the lake initially objected to the application, but that resulted in a series of meetings over the years.

He said they involved Mayor Allan Thompson, Councillor Doug Beffort, Shaughnessy and Sinclair, who he said was most helpful.

There have been revisions to the plan, and Barnett said that as of November, the Association is fine with what Lafarge has in mind and objections have been withdrawn.

He also told Thompson neither side completely got what it wanted, but the result was reasonable.

Thompson expressed appreciation to the group for working with the Town and Lafarge.

I think you've set a new standard in Caledon, he commented.

Councillors also heard from Brian Zeeman, a consultant with MERC Planning Urban Design and Landscape Architecture, appearing on behalf of Lafarge.

He expressed appreciation to the Association, as well as for the thorough review from Town staff.

It was a tremendous process and a great outcome, he remarked.

The modifications to the application, according to material in Zeman's presentation, included increased buffers to environmental features, a reduction in the licensed area to accommodate Association members, additional plantings in the rehabilitation plan, expanding the scope of the public liaison committee, and enhanced water monitoring program, etc.

Councillor Doug Beffort complimented both sides for the work they did to bring the agreements about, especially when it came to protecting Green Lake. He called it a nice, long, beautiful lake.

Green Lake has got a little bit of history, he added.

But not everyone was as enthused.

Sinclair addressed Council two weeks later as the committee recommendations were about to be ratified, stressing he was speaking on his own behalf, and not for the Association or landowners.

He did point out there are a lot of cottages on Green Lake, totally surrounded by strip mining operations. He added there's been no attempt on the part of the Town to support the people who own land in the area. He added the negotiations between Lafarge and the land owners have been totally one-sided.

Sinclair cited the staff report as stating there is no requirement for a stand-alone social impact study in Caledon's Official Plan. He argued there is a requirement on the part of the applicant to assess social impacts for a new extraction operation or expansion of an existing one.

It's very clear they are to be considered, he argued.

Sinclair also cited the staff report as stating the application is consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement, but he said the staff report wasn't.

Councillor Annette Groves was curious how such apparent inconsistencies had not been addressed.

Sinclair told Shaughnessy the plan is to have the pit operating from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. five days per week, and from 7 a.m. to noon Saturdays. No mining is planned in the winter. But he said the plan is to having a strip mine operating when people are trying to enjoy the lake.

I find it amazing, he said.

Beffort pointed out, however, that members of the Green Lake Association had approved what's being planned, and had actually signed off on it.

Senior Planner Brandon Ward said the staff report addressed in detail the issues that were raised by the public.

Groves expressed concern that land owners might not have the resources to fight something like this.

"The aggregate industry is Goliath and these folks are David," she remarked.

Shaughnessy added this is a very important issue for Ward 1 residents.

She added she's talked to some Green Lake residents and they hadn't realized what they were facing with the aggregate industry.

"These people were there long before aggregate was there," she said.

Shaughnessy unsuccessfully moved that the report be referred back to staff to see if more work was required to bring the proposal in line with the Provincial Policy Statement.

"A little more time won't hurt," she argued.

Ward commented the report reflected expert, professional planning recommendations, adding parts of it have been peer-reviewed.

He told Councillor Nick deBoer there had been a public information meeting, as well as a public information centre under the Aggregate Resources Act. He said that was a very involved process.

Beffort was concerned with a possible suggestion that residents had been duped in the process, believing the staff report addressed all the necessary items. He added the residents "were sharp enough to put together a lot of good things."

He also said people along Green Lake did their work and kept themselves informed.

"They asked questions and they got answers," he observed.