

Many unhappy people at prospect of west Caledon aggregate pit

By Bill Rea

It's going to take some effort to find people in the area of a proposed west Caledon aggregate pit who support what Olympia Sand and Gravel Inc. have in mind.

About 70 people were on hand for a public information meeting on the proposal last Wednesday evening, and most in the crowd didn't like what they were hearing.

There were numerous complaints about noise, truck traffic, water use, air quality and the need for the material. There were also people who were upset with the length of time it's taken for the matter to be resolved.

The Olympia proposal was subject of another public information meeting roughly five years ago. That session was late starting and went well past midnight, so there were calls for another meeting. Since then, there have been changes to the proposal.

Ohi Izirein, a senior planner with the Town, said the application involves about 291 acres at Lots 27 and 28, Concession 2, in west Caledon. The property is between Porterfield and Willoughby Roads, just north of Highpoint Sideroad. The company has applied to have the area classified for extraction in both the Town's zoning and Official Plan.

Izirein added the land is regarded as a high-potential mineral resource area.

He also explained this matter is subject to a two-stream application process, with the Town dealing with the necessary issues of Official Plan and zoning under the Planning Act, while the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) is concurrently dealing with the issuance of a licence under the Aggregate Resources Act. Izirein added the Town's approval of the applications is necessary before the licence can be granted.

He said planners are hoping to have a report and recommendation before Town council some time in the fall.

Debra Kakaria, an associate with MHBC Planning, Urban Design and Landscape Architecture, told the meeting the pit they are planning will be only mining material above the water table, although there will also be a permit sought from the Ministry of the Environment to take water. As well, Peel Region will have to approve the access to the site from Porterfield.

Kakaria said there have been changes to the ownership of the company since the 2008 meeting, but she said it's a locally-based group of owners, adding Brock Aggregates are no longer involved. She was later pressed for more details about the owners by one of the women in the audience.

?Will they be enjoying the trucks with us?? she asked.

Kakaria wasn't able to provide many more details, apart from saying they live in Caledon.

?I haven't been invited over to their house,? she said.

The actual proposed extraction area will be about 200 acres.

The changes to the application since 2008 include a reduction in the size of the extraction area (by about 50 acres). There are also proposals for tree screens along Porterfield and Willoughby, as well as for an enhanced water-monitoring program. As well, the company has said the fixed processing plant will be closed off, to cut down on the noise.

In addition, she said the amount of material to mined has been reduced from 13 million to 12 million tonnes. An aggressive mining program could see the operation finished in 10 to 18 years, but Kakaria said 15 to 20 years is more realistic.

Most of the extraction will be 1.5 metres above the water table. The hours of mining will be from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. during the week, and 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturdays. It will be closed Sundays and holidays, although maintenance on the equipment will go on 24 hours a day as needed. Kakaria said these hours are pretty well standard in the industry.

As well, she said the pit would basically operate from April until September.

There might be a need, during off hours, to remove material in the event of an emergency. Kakaria said that would involve something like needing bags for sand to deal with flooding. She also said MNR would decide when there's such an emergency.

?It's extremely rare,? she added.

Access to the pit will be off Porterfield, and the haul route will head north to Dufferin Country Road 109.

Kakaria explained the last couple of years have been spent trying to address the concerns that had previously been raised, and that was part of reason things had been taking so long. She added there was an updated traffic report.

In addition, she said that before a licence is issued, Olympia will have to enter into an agreement with Peel Region over detailed design plans, along with any needed securities.

She also said the planned berms along Porterfield are to be higher than had been originally proposed.

The mining work will be done in stages, with rehabilitation to follow.

Kakaria also said MNR will be in charge of enforcing the site plan, adding there are hefty fines involved.?

‘There is a huge incentive on them to follow the rules of the site plan,’ she said.

She also said the company will have to provide water for residents who lose their supply because of the pit. Kakaria added, however, that since mining is not going beneath the water table, there's little chance local water will be impacted.

There was little in the way of support for the application from members of the public who spoke at the meeting.

Area resident Bev Reid took considerable time listing his concerns, and several people in the audience stood up and applauded when he was done.

His issues included the amount of water to be lost. He maintained it would be enough to sustain more than 7,000 residents, adding the loss can't be made up. He wanted to know how much would be lost, adding local residents are entitled to know.

He also wondered about the amount of water to be used to keep dust under control. He understood it would amount to 7,200 litres per hour on hot days.

Reid also raised issues about discrepancies in the amount of topsoil to be replaced during rehabilitation of the site.

Addressing an air-quality assessment on the pit, Reid said the report gave no indication that the consultant had previous experience with aggregate operations. There was also no mention of a peer review, he said.

Reid also asked about what the peak traffic volumes would be from the pit.

He was also upset that so much information was missing, although the application had been in the works for some nine years.

One Porterfield Road resident expressed concerns about traffic in the area, wondering who will pay for any needed improvements.

‘The developer's on the hook for any road improvement,’ Kakaria stated.

The resident also raised the issue of the increased taxes the Town can expect to raise from the pit, wondering how big a factor that was.

Councillor Richard Paterak said it would come to around \$300,000 to \$400,000 per year. As well, he said the Town will receive levies for every tonne removed from the site, amounting to roughly another \$240,000 annually. Paterak added there are hopes the levies will soon be increased.

Town staff will be sending a report on this issue to Caledon council. Paterak said it will include details on the financial implications from the development.

‘It's not the deciding factor,’ he said.

Several people complained that they had not been kept informed about the progress of the application. Some even said they received no notification of the meeting, finding out about it by accident.

One man pointed out a lot of area residents are stressed over this matter.

‘You're hanging us out to dry,’ he said. ‘Why are you treating us this way?’

Izirein replied that Town council had directed staff to increase the radius surrounding the site to where notifications were sent.

The resident also said he was not satisfied with the studies done on noise or dust. Regarding the traffic report, he said he has testified on such matters before the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB).

‘The traffic study was very poor,’ he asserted, adding there were no figures on the number of service vehicles or employees' cars on the site.

He also pointed out there will be a visual impact for people living on Flaherty Lane, which runs opposite from the access point for the pit. He acknowledged there's to be a berm along Porterfield, but said he would be able to see over that from his front deck.

‘The visual protection they are offering is nowhere near adequate,’ he charged.

Kakaria said the berms will be seven to 11 metres in height, with trees on top.

As well, the resident expressed concern for local property values, wondering who would buy a house across a road from a pit.

Kakaria told another man there will be asphalt stored on the site to be mixed with virgin aggregates, but there won't be an asphalt plant. She added there will be many specifications for the storage of such material, and they will be spelled out in the site plan.

The man also wondered about trails on the property that have been used for more than 20 years. Kakaria replied the property is private, with fences and ‘No Trespassing?’ signs. She added trails are there as part of forest management. People, she said, have been using the site without permission.

Several people were concerned about the impacts the pit will have on the hamlet of Melville. One 49-year resident of Melville said southern border of the pit is just 350 metres from the hamlet.

‘That, to me, is already in our back yards,’ he declared.

He also complained he had not heard a word about where the councillors stand on this.

Paterak commented there are limits on what council can do on this. A lot depends on how the proposal complies with the Official Plan. That will have a lot of bearing on the recommendation from Town staff, and he said councillors would vote against that at their

peril. In that event, council's decision could be overturned at the Board level.

Another man raised the issue of using water to wash the internal roads on the site, wondering where it will come from.

Patty Wong, senior geologist with AECOM, said it will come from a supply pond, adding that will be part of a closed-loop system.

She said there will be water lost through evaporation, but it will be offset by precipitation.

One woman pointed out there are other properties in the area with supplies of aggregate, and she wondered if there are other proposals being put together. Izirein said he wasn't aware of any.

Another man asked to see a business plan for the pit. He said if people could see a tangible benefit, there might be as much concern.

?We've not done a very good job of communicating,? Councillor Doug Beffort observed.