

Melville pit proposal said bad for Orangeville

By Jordan Nunziato

Orangeville Council was warned Monday night of irreversibly detrimental effects on the town if Olympia Sand & Gravel Ltd. is allowed to proceed with its Melville Pit project.

A delegation of Melville-area residents said the proposed 200-acre gravel pit, to be located just one kilometre south of town, would create a world of trouble for Orangeville residents.

Caledon resident Paul Bunt spoke on behalf of Citizens Against the Melville Pit (CAMP), and gave council details of the proposed pit and its negative impacts.

"This particular pit is applying for extraction of 1.2 million tonnes per year, which is a very large amount," he told council. "The information provided by the applicants suggests that it will be mined in stages, probably over 20 years or more."

Mr. Bunt said the existing uses of the property, located north of Highpoint Sideroad between Porterfield Road (Peel 136) and Willoughby Road, are for food production. He said the site has been a consistent food producer for many years.

He gave a number of reasons why Orangeville should be concerned about the pit.

"First of all, the gravel pit is an open pit mine. I'm continually dumbfounded at how a western civilized society could even consider the possibility of an open pit mine next door to residential properties and the like," he said.

He said the designated haul route for the pit is out onto Porterfield Road, and all the trucks are intended to proceed north on Porterfield to the Orangeville bypass portion of Dufferin 109. They are then to turn right and proceed easterly to Highway 10.

"The total volume of traffic projected by the applicant's own traffic consultant is about 460 trucks per day on the six days of the week that they operate. That averages out to a truck every 90 seconds," said Mr. Bunt.

He said a major concern for Orangeville residents should be air quality, which an open pit mine would defile.

"Of course everyone's aware that gravel pits create dust when they're excavating. The dust that is really a concern is the silica, and there's not nearly enough attention paid to this issue with respect to gravel pits in our area," he said. "Silica is a serious health risk and is a documented carcinogen. The parts that are problematic are the small particles, below 10 microns, that are invisible."

Bunt said studies out of California conducted on gravel pits show that these particles can stay in the air for days, and they travel for miles.

"The thing about silica is that once it's absorbed in your lungs, it can never be removed," he said.

Water is the single biggest concern of the people who joined CAMP, since gravel pits use water in almost every process.

"To excavate, they wash the gravel to wash small particles away. They use it in their crushing operations. They use it to keep the dust down. They spray water all over the site to keep the dust down. They spray on roads so that trucks don't stir up more dust. They're actually obligated to keep the dust down," said Mr. Bunt. "The amount of water that's forecast to be used by this pit at 1.2 million tonnes per year is 11 million litres of water per week. That is huge. That's enough water to support a town of 7,000 people." Mr. Bunt said that over 150 homes within a kilometre of the pit will be impacted by a loss of property values that will reduce property tax revenues.

Mayor Rob Adams said some of the residents have already been in touch with him through Facebook and Twitter, and he has made it clear to them that he has some real concerns about this application.

"I believe it's a very real and serious threat to the Orangeville community," he said.

When Councillor Mary Rose asked Bunt about what Caledon councillors have to say with regard to this pit, he replied that the councillors have been careful not to take a position on it.

Mayor Adams introduced a motion to write, on behalf of council, a letter to Caledon raising concerns around the impact to water, silica, truck traffic, property values, and restating the core values that the municipality holds as important: the outdoor lifestyle, tourism and a green community, and to indicate that they are reviewing their options on taking a number of possible actions. The motion carried.