

Much interest in plan to expand pit into Caledon

By Bill Rea

Plans are in the works to have a large sand and gravel operation in Erin cross the border into Caledon, and it's drawn a lot of interest. James Dick Construction Limited is putting forth the plan, which will require a licence from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) under the Aggregate Resources Act (ARA). The Town of Caledon will also have to approve a rezoning for the approximately 309 acres on the east side of Winston Churchill Boulevard, west of Shaws Creek Road and south of Charleston Sideroad.

A large number of residents were out for a public open house session last Thursday in Erin. Many questions were raised, dealing with such things as impacts on local water supplies, and whether such a pit expansion is really needed.

People at the session were told the plan is to expand the current operation on the west side of Winston Churchill across the road, in the interest of meeting anticipated demand. The plan is to retain the existing haul routes from the Erin site, including the use of Winston Churchill to Charleston, as well as Wellington Road 52 to the south. Shaws Creek will not be used as a haul route.

The property is extractive industrial in Caledon's Official Plan, but it's currently zoned agricultural, meaning the rezoning will be required.

There are plans to extract material from below the water table.

The current extraction limit for the Erin site is 925,000 tonnes per year. The plan is to increase that to 1.8 million tonnes for the combined operation.

There are also plans for a conveyor system crossing under the road between the two pits. James Dick Executive Vice-President Greg Sweetnam said the plan is to transport material from the new site to the processing plant on the Erin side. Once extraction in Erin is complete (except for the lands occupied by the plant), that operation will be moved across the road, and material from the last of the Erin extraction will be shipped east on the conveyor. Sweetnam added construction of the new plant is anticipated to take place in 2033, with the existing one being dismantled.

In terms of timing, Sweetnam extracting in the existing pit will start to wind down in about 10 years, with the new pit starting in about 2027, and continuing until about 2077.

Consultant James Parkin of MHBC Planning said the site has been identified as a high-priority aggregate area in both the Town's and Peel Region's Official Plans for years, having been designated for eventual extraction since the 1970s.

One man raised the issue of proposed development in the Belfountain area. Parkin said the developers would have to be mindful of the aggregate extraction designation that's in place.

He also said there are years of records involving local wells, and there have been no cases of any of them going dry.

Information presented at the session stated hydrogeological assessments have been conducted. There are 22 private wells within 500 metres of the site, and there's no disruption to any water supplies anticipated.

As well, there will be no extraction below the water table within 400 metres of the Credit River.

Since there will have to be a rezoning sought from the Town, there will have to be a public information meeting, but Parkin said that won't be until next year. He added the new zoning has to be in place before MNRF will issue the licence. As well, forested lands along the river valley will be protected from extraction, forming a natural buffer between the river and the pit.

Councillor Doug Beffort expressed concerns about extraction under the water table.

"These are the kinds of things that I'm going to be interested in as we go through this," he commented.

Councillor Barb Shaughnessy was pleased so many people were out for the session, although she wished there had been more representation from Town of Caledon staff.

She added most of the concerns she heard dealt with the water table.

She also heard questions about the need for the expansion.

"What people feel is pits always open, but nothing closes down," she said.

Former councillor Ian Sinclair was curious about the plans to have the operation cross the municipal boundary, wondering if it was going to cross jurisdiction districts of the Ministry.

"I don't know how that's to be decided," he remarked.

He also wondered about whether Winston Churchill would have to be closed while the conveyor system is being installed.

"I don't see Winston Churchill being closed," he said. "It's a major haul route now."

Some people wondered if the extra extraction area is really needed.

"What the hell do they need all that gravel for?" wondered Shaws Creek Road resident Dale St Clair, who was also concerned about

local water supplies.

Palgrave area resident Cheryl Connors, who has been active in the opposition to the expansion of what's known as the Tottenham Pit, had problems with the process, commenting many people don't understand it.

She said people have until Aug. 21 to file letters of objection to the proposal.

"I think most of the people in this room don't know that," she declared.

She also pointed out a lot of interested residents would be on vacation at this time.

"That's what I think is unfair about the process," she said. "It's very complicated."

"Why do we need it?" wondered Caledon resident Bob Shapton of Pitsense, adding there's a 200-year supply of material in existing pits. "They know we don't need it."

But Sweetnam pointed out it's expected there will be unprecedented growth, in terms of both population and employment, in Caledon over the next 50 years.

"They're running very low in high-quality concrete sand material," he remarked, adding the site is very close to market, meaning it's easy to transport without creating much pollution from truck emissions.