

Olympia opponents want more time to comment

By Nick Fernandes

Caledon's Citizens Against the Melville Pit (CAMP) spoke out to Caledon council last week, making it clear the public comment period on the proposal needs to be extended.

Paul Bunt of CAMP was at last Tuesday's meeting armed with a body of evidence aimed at convincing the Town and Province of the need to extend the deadline for public comment.

Olympia Sand and Gravel Inc.'s proposal 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.

The main thrust of Bunt's argument was that under government guidelines, the application and reports by Olympia have not met a standard of thoroughness. He added they contained several factual errors. He also said the Province and Olympia have not completed the peer reviews for the visual impact assessment or air quality assessments, and that several reports need to be revised. He also said CAMP has conducted a review of some of the application materials under the Official Plan requirements that demand the information be provided to the public.

"This has been going on since 2005," Bunt told councillors. "We've been around for about a year and a half and we're still finding errors."

Along with the absence of the peer reviews, CAMP maintained that the projected haul route for the trucks transporting aggregate is unsafe, according to the Geometric Design of Canadian Roads Textbook, published by the Transport Association of Canada. The applicant has stated that the route is safe, despite a dip in the Porterfield Road measured by CAMP that would make the trucks invisible to vehicles turning from Flaherty Lane, Bunt added.

Also prominent among the errors he cited was an oversight regarding the conservation status of the designated area. The survey conducted did not report any species considered endangered by the federal government. But when CAMP brought in their own expert biologist to study the area, he said hard evidence was found of the Jefferson salamander, a species that is threatened in Ontario and is specifically protected by the Endangered Species Act of 2007. The species also has a wide-roaming range, making attempts to protect the salamanders by moving them ineffective.

Town staff proposed extending the comment period to September or October. Several in the public gallery thought that was just a small extension, eliciting grumbles from the crowd. One man heard to mutter "ridiculous."

The main concern from staff was the time needed to put together their own report on the situation after analysing public comments. Bunt asserted that the application has changed drastically since it was first introduced and that a further delay is required in order to account for new information.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli agreed with Bunt.

"I could send in a minimalistic application and have it deemed complete, and then drastically change it," he observed.

Councillor Richard Whitehead suggested to staff that the matter is not realistically going to be settled by the end of the year, and that they should put together a reasonable timeline of how long it will take for all reports to be submitted and put together.

Bunt himself requested that decisions should be delayed until the completion of the Province's Aggregate Resources Act review and the review of the Provincial Policy Statement.

"It's been eight years and here we are today with this hanging over us," Bunt said. The matter is to be delayed before being brought back to council, giving CAMP and similar groups more time to give their input.