

Opponents gear up to take Olympia pit to OMB

By Bill Rea

Opposition to the Melville pit is not going away.

In fact, it's going to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB).

Citizens Against the Meville Pit (CAMP) hosted two meetings last week, including one Sunday in Alton, to drum up support and outline some of the plans in the coming fight. There were about 120 people at the Alton session.

Caledon council, in December, voted to support the application of Olympia Sand and Gravel Ltd. to recognize the roughly 291 acres at Lots 27 and 28, Concession 2 in west Caledon (just north of Melville) for extraction. The move came after councillors heard from more than a dozen delegations voicing opposition to the proposal.

Councillor Doug Beffort was the only one to oppose the motion. He stated at the time the data was incomplete, especially concerning water issues.

Sam Asher, who chaired Sunday's meeting, told the audience they want to spread good information and demonstrate why they are fighting this.

"We have to protect our community," she declared.

Asher explained CAMP is a non-profit, volunteer organization working to preserve food-producing land, clean water and access to clean water. She said it all ties into public health, adding they are trying to preserve the local lifestyle. That includes fighting such industrial operations going so close to residential areas.

Addressing the massiveness of this proposal, Asher said it will take up the equivalent of 220 National Football League fields, adding it will be the third largest pit in Caledon.

Asher said the original application dates to 2005, and the first public information meeting was in 2008. The application was updated about a year ago, with an open house last April, followed by another public information meeting in June.

"We were all sort of scratching our heads," she said of that session, believing they weren't getting all of the information. So opponents to the proposal started doing their own research, and CAMP was founded in July.

The group made council deputations in Caledon and Orangeville in August, and engaged legal counsel in December.

Asher said the appeal of council's decision to OMB was launched Jan. 9.

"We don't believe that's right," she said, pointing to the concerns over water, air and traffic. "We're going to push through because it's what we have to do to make it right."

Water is a huge issue, she stressed. She said discrepancies have been found in many of the reports, adding an expert had predicted the local aquifer will dry up in four days if the operation is approved. Asher added no one has refuted those findings.

Asher pointed out local residents depend on well water, and she wondered what would happen if the aquifer went dry.

"Who will help us if we do run out of water?" she asked.

"Together, we can win this," she urged the audience, "and together we can protect what we care about, and water is one of those things."

Mary Haslett of CAMP recalled Dr. Alex Riddell, an ear, nose and throat specialist, addressed Town councillors the night they voted to support the proposal, stating there were concerns over respiration health issues.

She pointed out excavation creates dust, with the fine particles being carried by the wind, and that Riddell had predicted they will have impacts, especially on the elderly, as well as young people who spend a lot of time outside running around.

Haslett commented there are three schools near the site, meaning there will be an impact on more than 1,000 students. She also referred to dust that will fall off trucks carrying the mined material.

In terms of what can be done, Haslett observed that the Town of Oakville has a bylaw that allows for fines for companies that pollute excessively. She added the Town can be called upon to do regular air-monitoring tests, as well as to require aggregate applicants to address how they are going to deal with pollution.

Traffic engineer Paul Bunt said he has found errors in the technical data.

He said the plan is to have the haul route run out of the property to Porterfield Road, then north to the Orangeville Bypass (County Road 109), then east to Highway 10. But he pointed out there's nothing that mandates truck drivers to use such a route.

"Trucks go where they want to go," he said, adding they could run through the heart of Alton. "There's no certainty that this is not going to happen."

He added the Bypass is not the optimal road to handle this kind of truck traffic.

As well, he pointed out that while the property is in Caledon, Orangeville is going to be impacted. The Bypass is a Dufferin County road, meaning the money for maintaining it will have to come from there. Orangeville and Dufferin will see no financial benefit from this operation.

One man at the meeting pointed out if construction work is needed on the Bypass, trucks will likely be diverted through Alton. 'Gravel truck drivers are notorious for not paying attention to the regulations,' Bunt observed. 'You can't rely on what they're supposed to do.'

There were a couple of questions about why such an operation is needed now. Asher said the regulations do not require an applicant to demonstrate need.

'At the common-sense level, we all have to be asking 'why?'' she commented.

There were also questions raised about the quality of the material on the site, with some wondering why anyone would want to mine it.

Bunt also said there are proposals for a recycling depot on the site, meaning loaded truck could be both entering and leaving.

Asher wondered what the recycled material might contain, and what could end up seeping into the aquifer.

There were a couple of political comments coming up at the meeting, as one man urged people to remind councillors this is an election year.

'This smells of a Tory policy,' one man charged. 'It's all about jobs at any cost.'

'They built the space shuttle Columbia with the lowest bidder, and the same thing with the Titanic,' he added. 'That doesn't mean it's the right thing to do.'

'The whole regime needs to be changed at election time,' another man charged. 'Vote them out of office.'