

Town asked to help in fight against Tottenham Pit

By Bill Rea

It looks like Caledon councillors might be ready to rethink their position on addressing the planned expansion of the Tottenham Pit. Members of the Planning and Development committee of council voted Tuesday night to refer a letter from Natural Resources and Forestry Minister Bill Mauro to staff for a report. Councillor Nick deBoer, who chairs the committee, said he was hoping the report will be ready for its next meeting.

This was after they heard from representatives from Protect Caledon Inc., the residents' group that had opposed the expansion. The Ministry, in June, approved the Aggregate Resources Act (ARA) site plan amendment for the property, submitted by Brock Aggregates. The pit is in the northeast corner of Caledon (near Highway 9 and Mount Wolfe Road).

Local residents announced in October they would be seeking a judicial review of the ruling, and were angry that the Town was not joining them in that effort. Council, at the time, voted to call on Brock Aggregates to come up with terms of reference for a public liaison committee, and appointed deBoer to sit on it. Councillors also voted to seek a meeting with the Minister to make local concerns clear.

That meeting is not likely to happen, in light of the letter from Mauro, received by the Town Jan. 28.

"Regrettably, I am unable to meet with you to discuss this matter," the Minister wrote.

Mauro stated in his letter the site plan amendment was approved in June, about seven years after the application had been made. Over that period, he stated there had been meetings and discussions held between the proponents, his ministry and various agencies, including the Town. He also pointed out the proponents held their own public meeting in March 2012.

"Through this consultation process the extent of increased extraction was significantly reduced from what was originally proposed," he wrote, adding the amendment that was being sought addressed matters like noise, dust and groundwater.

Mauro added comments and suggestions from the Town were considered prior to the approval.

Mike McGarrell, of Protect Caledon, agreed there have been a number of public sessions, adding this was the seventh deputation he had made to council.

He also recalled council's decision not to take part in the judicial review came in October, after a closed session that lasted more than an hour.

"It was the wrong decision for a myriad of reasons," he declared.

He also observed residents had been assured by the Town in 2011 that the municipality would act on their behalf. He argued that since then, residents "have been deceived and lied to."

Cheryl Connors, also representing Protect Caledon, told councillors the group has retained an environmental lawyer who has set down a strong opinion that the approval violates the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, as well as the Planning Act.

"We're confident this will be quite successful," she declared.

Connors said the pit is about 500 metres from her home. She also cited a section in Mauro's letter that stated on-site crushing will take place a maximum of four weeks per year. She said she was "horrified" to learn that, pointing out it will create dust, which could cause health problems, including lung cancer.

Connors said her mother died of lung cancer. "It's a horrible, horrible way to die," she said, adding prevailing winds will carry dust over her home.

She also said the application itself has caused a reduction in the value of her home.

"I want to move," she said in a trembling voice. "I don't want to live here any more. I don't want my family to die."

"I'm asking for your help because it's the right thing to do," Connors added, pointing out they have the legal opinion that makes them optimistic, and they'd prefer to do this in partnership with the Town. "If it were you in that position, you would want to protect your family too."

Councillor Doug Beffort pointed out they had originally determined the best route would be to seek a meeting with the Minister.

"We were simply turned down flat by the Minister," he observed.