

Town backs Olympia's plan for Melville pit

By Bill Rea

There was lots of opposition in the room, but Caledon councillors agreed Monday night back the plans of Olympia Sand and Gravel Ltd. to operate a pit just north of Melville.

Councillors sat for more than four hours, hearing more than a dozen delegations from the community voicing opposition to the proposal. As well, two representatives of Olympia made presentations before a standing-room-only crowd that filled two rooms at Town Hall.

Doug Beffort was the only councillor to oppose the motion to approve the amendment to the Town's Official Plan and the rezoning to recognize the roughly 291 acres at Lots 27 and 28, Concession 2, in west Caledon for extraction. He stated the data that's incomplete, especially concerning water issues.

But others pointed out Town planners had supported the application, and not going along with that could have created serious problems if the matter ended up before the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB).

'This is a very difficult evening for me,' Councillor Richard Paterak observed, commenting he was forced to oppose a lot of his neighbours.

Dealing with this proposal has involved a lengthy process, complete with two public information meetings (one in 2008 and the other was in June of this year). Planners stated the application was reviewed under the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS), the Greenbelt Plan, Peel Region's Official Plan, etc., and they said consideration was given to the Endangered Species Act. Planners concluded the proposed land use is consistent with the Provincial, Regional and Town policies, as the lands are in an area that's recognized for its high potential for aggregate resources. They also stated a draft site plan under the Aggregate Resources Act (ARA) included conditions to make sure possible impacts from dust, noise, traffic, etc., on the surrounding community are minimized. As well, planners cited a hydrogeological report from Olympia (which had been peer reviewed) that concluded there will be no impact on neighbouring wells.

While some people who spoke at the meeting were complimentary of the work staff had done, there were several who said there were a number of issues that had not been properly addressed.

Paul Bunt, representing Citizens Against the Melville Pit (CAMP), said the report contained several provisions that were inconsistent with the Official Plan, adding there were issues raised at the June meeting that should have been addressed, but were not.

He also said this will be an incompatible land use with the nearby homes, including a 10-lot subdivision across the road, the Melville community to the south and the fact the Orangeville is just north of the site.

He also raised the issue of water, citing the planning report that stated 'the use of groundwater for the washing of aggregate is critical to the Olympia operations as proposed.'

Bunt said this operation will use some 78 million litres of water per week, comparing that to the roughly 49 million litres used in the Town of Orangeville.

'This matter of water is no small issue,' he said, citing hydrogeological studies that indicated the local aquifer could never handle such demand.

Hydrogeologist Bill Blackport, who peer reviewed the study for the Town, said that matter will need more site specific details when it comes to the application for a permit to take water from the site. He did point out the figure of 78 million litres did not take into account the water that would be recycled. He also said the permit would have to be issued by the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) and that will only happen once they are convinced there will be no off-site impacts.

Mary Hall, director of development approval and planning policy for the Town, added the permit to take water would only be issued after the Official Plan amendment and rezoning is approved. She had to make that point several times during the meeting.

Bob Shapton made a presentation on the social impact from the pit.

He pointed out the Town passed an amendment to its Official Plan in 2000 (known as OPA 161). Among the provisions he cited was a requirement to have a social impact study, as well as commitments to make sure the impacts are mitigated to the satisfaction of the Town. Shapton said some of the provisions of OPA 161 were challenged to OMB, and some of the differences were settled through back-room meetings.

Shapton asked the proposal not be approved until the various studies have been reviewed to demonstrate how the social impacts have been addressed.

On the other side of the discussion, lawyer Celeste Iacobelli, representing Olympia, observed the process began some years ago, and

has involved numerous meetings and reports. He added the company has retained the services of a number of third-party experts to make sure the public interest is addressed.

Iacobelli also said the planning report was fair and thorough. "We support the staff report," he said, adding deferral of the matter would not be appropriate. He said it's time to move forward, adding the issue of the water permit will be addressed, but Olympia can't apply for it until the zoning and pit licence have been approved. The Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) has to approve the licence.

Debra Kakaria, an associate with MHBC Planning, Urban Design and Landscape Architecture, was also appreciative of the staff report, pointing out it reflected more than eight years of work.

"Some of the residents may not be happy with the outcome," she admitted, but pointed out mitigation measures have been enhanced to provide safeguards against impacts.

She also stressed this is an appropriate and encouraged land use, according to OPA 161.

"This is an area where pits are to go, if they are developed responsibly," Kakaria maintained.

Addressing the water issue, Kakaria said seeking a temporary permit for a pumping test has been looked into, but MOE had told her such a permit would not be considered until the planning approvals are in place.

That wasn't good enough for some at the meeting. Local resident Mary Haslett wondered why pumping tests couldn't be conducted before the rezoning.

"Put it in writing that the wells will not be impacted," she said.

She added she has the right to enjoy her property without having a pit nearby.

"Who will repair the cracks in my foundation caused by the vibrations?" she demanded.

As well, she raised concerns about traffic, dust and diesel fumes from trucks, suggesting some trucks might use Main Street in Alton as a haul route, through a school zone.

Haslett commented that Caledon is proud of its reputation as a green community.

"Honestly, it's not green," she said. "It's the pits."

Hall told Councillor Patti Foley the haul routes will be identified in the site plan, which will be Regional Road 136 to County Road 109 to Highway 10. The only time changes would be permitted would be for local deliveries of material. She added MNR could stop extraction on the site if the proper haul routes are not being used.

Former mayor Norm Calder raised concerns about truck traffic, and the cost the Town would have to carry to maintain the roads.

"What is the urgent need for another hole in Caledon?" he asked.

"I guess this is where the rubber hits the proverbial gravel road," Beffort observed.

While he agreed a lot of hard work has gone into this, on the part of Town staff and Olympia, Beffort said he's been dealing with gravel issues for some 40 years. "It's a passionate thing for me," he remarked.

Beffort stressed there is missing information, and he pointed to the need to address broader issues before making a decision.

"I don't know why we're in such an all-fired hurry," he remarked.

He also commented there's a concern that if the permit to take water is not granted, this could end up being a dry pit, and he wondered if there would be much of a demand for such material.

As well, Beffort said there's been no provisions on who will pick up the bill if water is disrupted.

Councillor Richard Whitehead was able to get his colleagues to go along with a provision in council's motion calling on MNR to issue a licence for a dry pit only. He later explained that Olympia would be able to apply for an amendment to the licence, but the advantage would be that would involve a public process.

"It's pretty difficult for us to just say 'no,'" Whitehead observed. "That doesn't mean we should roll over and play dead on these issues."

He also pointed out that if council rejected the application, the matter would end up before OMB and the municipality would lose any control it had.

"I appreciate the passion," Paterak said, but he pointed out the Town has policies governing these issues, and staff believed the requirements had been met. To oppose the application could mean staff could be called to testify against the council position at OMB, and he said that would also require a lot of taxpayers' money, with little hope for a return on that investment.

"I can't go down that road," he said.

Mayor Marolyn Morrison agreed it's hard to go against policy, and then defend that at OMB.