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## Meeting digs into quarry water issues

Dianne Cornish

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Initially unnerved by the announcement that St. Mary's Cement will now be leading the charge for the proposed quarry in northeast Flamborough, members of a grassroots citizens' group opposed to the project have regrouped and come out swinging.

At a public meeting at Balaclava School last week, area residents were advised not to be fooled by the "slick" PR campaign that the large aggregate company is expected to unfold in coming months.

St. Mary's, which became owners of the site at 11th Concession Road East and Milborough Line in June, will try to win residents over in a variety of ways with "corporate slick messaging," Graham Flint, chair of FORCE (Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment), warned the crowd of about 200 residents who filled the Carlisle school's auditorium during the meeting organized by Councillor Margaret McCarthy.

Acknowledging that St. Mary's is "much more experienced and professional" and has "much, much deeper pockets" than the site's previous owner, Lowndes Holdings Corporation, Flint reminded the crowd that the "real issues" firing opposition to the quarry remain. The 158-hectare (390-acre) site is surrounded by existing rural communities, has significant hydrogeologic and environmental features and offers limited transportation options for haul routes, he said.

Flint predicted the cement conglomerate's campaign will try to win over residents by disarming them into believing there is nothing to worry about, charming them into accepting the proposed quarry and pitting residents against each other. The company might make large donations to community arenas or charities to gain public favour, he suggested.

Flint pointed to a recent community newsletter circulated by the company as an example, noting that it mentions every concern and tries to defuse residents' concerns. But the facts don't change, he argued. "They can't show us our water won't be impacted."

Possible impacts to the groundwater from quarry operations dominated much of the discussion at the meeting. Noting that part of the wellhead protection zone providing water for area wells and the communal water system in Carlisle is located on the quarry site, McCarthy talked about "water woes" that already exist in the area and the need "not to mess with our most precious resource."

She attacked the idea of the water recirculation system proposed by St. Mary's as a method of recharging the aquifer with water after it is pumped from the quarry floor. "It's new and untested...and hasn't been used on fractured bedrock," she told the crowd.

A hydrogeologist hired by McCarthy to conduct an independent review of environmental reports on the quarry backed up McCarthy's misgivings about an unproven water recirculation system. Ian Macdonald, of WESA (Water and Earth Science Associates), a Kitchener-based environmental sciences consulting company, said the "major shortcoming" of the proposed system is "purely conceptual and there's no proof it works."

Macdonald said he holds serious doubts about the ability of an operation on the scale proposed by St. Mary's to reintroduce the water into the ground from the quarry floor.

"Getting water back into the ground is difficult. It's harder to get water back into the bedrock than to extract it,"

he stressed.

Macdonald also said it'll be difficult to get water to move away from the quarry into the recirculation trenches with such strong gradients towards the quarry.

In response to a question from the floor about the conceptual recirculation system proposed by St. Mary's and the company's assertion that the plan is the one chosen and will work, Macdonald was direct.

"That's a pretty nave approach," the consultant said, adding that the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), which approves aggregate extraction permits, "will not accept that."

St. Mary's officials said last week the system will be tested on the site late this year or early next year. Results of the test will be shared with various stakeholders, including the MNR, Ministry of the Environment, Conservation Halton, and the City of Hamilton.

Another audience member asked if there are any provincial guidelines regulating the reintroduction of water into the aquifer. Macdonald said the water has to be of good quality and it must be shown that it will not affect other users of that water.

#### WATER QUALITY

Answering yet another question about the potential of quarry dewatering on the quality and quantity of water in the area, Macdonald said it could affect both private wells and the communal well serving Carlisle. Private wells can be drilled deeper to deal with any problems, he suggested, "but trying to fix a municipal supply means a lot more money," he observed.

Ward 15 municipal candiate Judi Partridge attended the meeting but didn't participate in the presentations or question-and-answer period. She left before the meeting concluded.

Partridge contacted the Review afterward to state her opposition to the proposed quarry. Noting that Flamborough has been her home for more than 40 years, she said, "This is my community and I am very much on top of the issues surrounding the quarry application."

While acknowledging the work already done in challenging the application at the community and municipal level, she's concerned that not enough is being done at the provincial level. "Let's remember, the decision for this quarry will be made at Queen's Park," she said.

When discussion at the meeting turned to the protection of environmental features on the quarry site, such as environmentally sensitive areas, woodlots and provincially significant wetlands, Flint took issue with a statement in the recent St. Mary's newsletter which said that only 42 per cent of the entire site is extractable and the extraction area will be focused on open fields and not in designated natural heritage areas. He accused St. Mary's of trying to redefine the boundaries where natural heritage features exist.

The FORCE chair backed up his charge by quoting from a report released this summer in response to the quarry applicant's (at that time, Lowndes') Environmental Impact Study (EIS). The report, authored by Dougan and Associates, a peer review environmental team hired by the City of Hamilton, said, "...it is atypical for an EIS to propose alternate criteria for redefining regional and provincial scale natural heritage features, particularly when they endorse encroachment on natural heritage features including provincially significant wetlands, significant woodlots, and significant portions of habitat for threatened and endangered species."

The report also says, "... it is premature and inappropriate for the EIS to discuss impacts or make conclusions regarding the ability to mitigate impacts until the technical studies...are completed."

Representatives of St. Mary's were invited to attend last week's public meeting, but declined saying they were not ready to discuss the project in such a forum "at this time." Flint said FORCE sent a letter to company officials last week asking them to meet with members of its steering committee to discuss community concerns about the proposed quarry.



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