



FORCE drives home message: 'It's not over yet'

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It's not over yet.

That's the message the anti-quarry group FORCE is hoping to drive home to residents of northeast Flamborough who may believe the battle against the proposed St Marys Quarry is finished.

"We've got to make sure we complete that last step," said Graham Flint, chair of Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment, the group that is fighting the quarry planned for a site on 11th Concession Road East and Milburough Line. Despite the air of optimism about ultimately winning the battle to stop the proposal that reached its zenith in April, when the provincial government decided to put a zoning freeze on the quarry lands, there's still a lot to be done, Flint stressed. In fact, the fight may well be entering a critical stage in a few months when an Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) hearing is expected to convene.

FORCE members are hopeful the scope of the upcoming hearing will focus on whether the provincial government acted appropriately in issuing the Ministerial Zoning Order (MZO), effectively closing the door on a quarry on the site. But the chair of the hearing could decide to look at the broader issue of whether a quarry licence should be granted to St Marys Cement (SMC), and basically determine the fate of the quarry application.

Fighting the proposal at the board hearing will be expensive, causing FORCE to embark on an ambitious campaign to raise \$200,000 in 18 months. Formal solicitation letters will be going out to area residents this week.

Since embarking on the campaign to fight the quarry in 2004, FORCE has been able to raise about \$100,000 each year to pay for legal and planning expertise. Flint says fighting the proposal at the OMB will be the largest expenditure yet.

To make people aware of recent developments in the ongoing battle, FORCE last month launched an eight-week newspaper advertising campaign carrying the slogan, "It's not over yet," and outlining residents' concerns, including the proposed quarry's impact on water, traffic, the environment and quality of life issues, such as dust and noise.

Large signs along various rural roads near the quarry site that once carried the message "Stop the quarry" are being replaced with the new tagline. FORCE recently revamped its website at www.stopthequarry.ca to feature videos of local residents voicing their concerns about the proposal.

Also, a doorknocker campaign by high school volunteers is under way on the east side of Milburough Line, Flint said, noting that the primary message about the quarry is, "It's closer than you think."

The FORCE chair said it's important for residents to know that, despite the Ontario government's intervention and continued opposition from area residents, St. Marys Cement has not given up.

"Their foot is pushed further down on the gas without letting up."

In May, the aggregate company asked the then-Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Jim Bradley to revoke the MZO and refer the matter to the OMB for a decision. Shortly after, the company filed an application for a permit to take water (PTTW) to conduct pump tests on the site.

When the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) denied the application, the company appealed the decision to the Environmental Review Tribunal (ERT). These actions by the aggregate company indicate it is not ready to abandon its plans for the Flamborough Quarry, Flint said.

On August 26, a pre-hearing was held in Waterdown to identify the parties that were to present arguments at next Wednesday's ERT hearing into the St Marys appeal. But in a surprising turn of events, SMC informed the tribunal this Tuesday that it was dropping its appeal.

The company offered no reason for its decision.

Flint said FORCE had already informed St Marys that it was planning to present a motion to the ERT arguing that the hearing was premature, as was the planned pump testing, because the OMB hasn't yet ruled whether it requires the information such tests would provide.

In an email to the Review last week, St Marys spokesperson Melanie Horton defended the company's position. "We are confident that the pumping test, which was designed in consultation with (local) agencies and FORCE, can be carried out without affecting water quality or quantity available to neighbouring residents."

Delaying the testing isn't necessary, she wrote. "St Marys would like to commence and complete its water test at the site to answer the questions that the community and the agencies have asked about the proposed groundwater recharge system for the quarry," her email said.

She also noted that the company hasn't heard anything from the Minister of Municipal Affairs about when an OMB hearing might be held. "As far as I know, there is no specific deadline that the Ministry has to respond to our application."

Flint predicted the quarry battle, begun six years ago, is coming to a close and could be over in a couple of years. "It's more winnable now than it was in 2004," he said. "We're showing them that sometimes David can slay Goliath, but we need to finish it."



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