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FORCE events committee members Donna Hainish and Mark Simone display a sign announcing the community group's victory over a quarry proposal for northeast Flamborough.

By Dianne Cornish,
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The mood was decidedly jubilant and the applause at times deafening as details of the agreement closing the door on a quarry proposed for northeast Flamborough were presented last Tuesday at a community information meeting in Carlisle.

Speaking to about 200 area residents at the event, which doubled as the annual general meeting of FORCE (Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment), the grassroots community group's chair Graham Flint said of the nine-year battle against the quarry:

"It's over, it's truly over." The agreement reached last month by the Ontario government and St Marys Cement (SMC), the quarry's proponent, guarantees through a conservation covenant that no quarry will ever be built on the site located at 11th Concession Road East and Milborough Line.

The covenant, which is registered on the land's title, protects the ecological features and water resources, not only on the site proposed for the quarry but also on an adjacent piece of land that quarry opponents feared would one day serve as an expansion of the project. "This is the best possible outcome we could have hoped for, short of owning the lands ourselves," Flint declared.

The final paperwork for the deal, which will delineate the boundaries of the protected area, is expected to be complete by the end of August. The agreement goes a step further than prohibiting a quarry on the site by also forbidding any other development that could affect water quality or quantity on the lands.

“We’ve not only preserved what’s there (now), but preserved it for generations to come,” said Flint, noting that the area will virtually be left in its natural state.

As part of the agreement, SMC is also dropping all current and pending litigation connected with the proposal, including an Ontario Municipal Board hearing, a judicial review of the government’s zoning order on the lands and a \$275-million (US) challenge against the Canadian government under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) for the estimated loss of revenue resulting from the company’s failure to secure approval of the quarry plan.

While acknowledging that, “on a personal level,” the government’s decision to pay \$15 million to the aggregate company to walk away from the project “sticks in my craw,” Flint said, if the decision is looked at pragmatically, “it was a good investment, given all the facts.” Ongoing costs to fight the proposal were significant at various levels, he explained. “Everyone was bleeding money on this.”

Had the project gone ahead, unknown future costs would also be incurred, he argued.

“What if the project went ahead and our water resources had been impacted,” he queried, suggesting that taxpayers would have been on the hook for engineering costs—in excess of the government’s payout to SMC—to provide a new water source for area residents.

He also said more regulatory reform in the aggregate approval process is needed to prevent similar costly quarry disputes.

Much of the crowd got to its feet to applaud MPP Ted McMeekin (Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale) during his brief address. McMeekin’s “unassuming persistence” at the provincial level played a key role in cementing the deal, Flint told residents.

Noting that the battle has strengthened the government’s resolve to review the provincial aggregate policy, McMeekin said the combined efforts of the community, Hamilton city council and local health departments helped defeat the proposal.

“You’re my heroes, each and every one of you,” he told the crowd. Flamborough councilor Judi Partridge, who lives in Carlisle close to the proposed quarry site, said victory had been “a long time coming,” but was achieved because opponents never lost focus and didn’t give up. City council was committed to “fighting the quarry from day one,” she said.

Flint said FORCE will remain active for another year while it wraps up various items of business, including dispersal of about \$200,000 in donations to the quarry fight. A community poll has been launched to get feedback from area residents on how the money should be divested, whether to one big project or organization or to several organizations.

To celebrate the demise of the quarry proposal, FORCE is hosting a lunchtime barbecue and party, Sunday, June 2 at the Carlisle Golf and Country Club.