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## Groundwater key issue in quarry debate

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The City of Hamilton's first public information meeting on the proposed Mountsberg Quarry in northeast Flamborough is expected to attract a capacity crowd next Thursday. It's also expected to draw some lively discussion about the quarry and its potential impact on groundwater in and around the 154-hectare (380-acre) quarry site at Milborough Line and the 11th Concession Road East.

"Groundwater is going to be the biggest issue" surrounding the quarry application, Graham Flint of FORCE (Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment) said last week. "It's the single biggest reason why it should be denied," he added.

Flint is chair of a well-organized and vocal community group which has opposed the quarry application from the start. He lives in a residential subdivision near the site and is concerned not only about groundwater quality and quantity in the area, but also about other potential environmental impacts of the proposal, including noise and dust pollution, increased truck traffic and the threat to wetlands and environmentally significant natural features in the area.

Members of FORCE are expected to fill the meeting hall Thursday night at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Elementary School, on Centre Road just south of 10th Concession Road East. The meeting will get underway at 6:30 p.m. and will include a series of presentations beginning at 7:15 p.m.

"It's basically a status meeting," Stan Holiday, Hamilton's senior planner co-ordinating the project, explained. No decisions about the application will result from the meeting, which Holiday said will serve as a method of gathering information from area residents who will have an opportunity to comment verbally as well as in written form during the evening. Referring to "the nature of the project," meaning its large scale, Holiday said the city decided to hold the meeting so that different components of the proposal can be explained and discussed. "It's the first of many," he said, alluding to the string of meetings that will follow.

The City of Hamilton will open the presentations with a report presented by Stephen Rowe, the city's aggregate planning advisor. Next, Robert Long, an environmental and planning engineer with the proponent, Lowndes Holdings Corp., will speak, followed by Flint. Afterwards, the meeting will open to delegations, and if time permits, a question and answer period from the floor will be held.

When contacted for a comment on the proponent's part in the upcoming meeting, company president David Lowndes issued a written response.

"We are looking forward to participating in the city's meeting on April 6," he wrote. "While we believe there is a good case to be made for the proposed Mountsberg Quarry, we also realize there is an ongoing consultation and approval process and that there will be questions to be addressed. We are committed to working with the community and to finding fair and reasonable solutions."

Holiday has suggested that the meeting will outline what stage the application has reached in the planning process, but FORCE members are hoping for more.

"If they talk only process, I think they're being unfair," said Flint, who hopes city officials will talk specifically about the findings of their peer review study, which indicate that the quality and quantity of well water in the area, including Carlisle's municipal water supply, could be compromised if the quarry gets the go-ahead.

"The city should tell them (residents) about preliminary concerns regarding the application," Flint insisted.

While the city has an obligation to proceed through the planning process with Lowndes, "it's also responsible to protect established homeowners, farm operations and businesses," he stressed.

Last summer, hydrogeologist Kenneth Raven of Intera Engineering in Ottawa warned that the proposed quarry could dry up adjacent wells and wetlands and threaten Carlisle's municipal water supply. Raven was hired by FORCE to review the quarry application.

Jager Hims Ltd. of Newmarket, hired by the city to look at groundwater studies submitted by Lowndes, reached basically the same conclusion. "Without mitigation, the proposed quarry will likely have a detrimental effect on adjacent water resources, such as streams, wetlands and residential wells," the firm reported.

The Jager Hims report also states, "The operation of the proposed quarry without mitigation will affect the capture zone (underground sources) of the Carlisle municipal wells."

FORCE has an ally in Flamborough councillor Margaret McCarthy, who believes that Carlisle residents, faced with water use restrictions in the past, will face even greater water problems if the quarry is established. In a recent newsletter, she warns that the quarry could use as much water daily as 51,300 people, or the equivalent of "putting the Town of Milton in your back yard."

The sheer volume of water required to dewater the quarry is "just outrageous," Flint said. Raven estimated that the quarry operation would pump out between 1.8 and 3.6 million gallons of water a day, he said.

Flint doesn't believe counter measures proposed by the proponent will be sufficient to mitigate groundwater impacts. He's not convinced that a plan calling for recirculation of the water used by the quarry will work when put to the test.

The Mountsberg quarry will operate up to 40 metres below the water table. In order to do this, it must be dewatered. Dewatering can locally depress the water table, altering groundwater flow paths and affecting nearby wells, springs, and surface water.

According to an operational plan included in the quarry application, the first phase of development will feature dewatering, monitoring, recharge and water management facilities. These include a storage pond, for recycling dust spray and aggregate wash water; a separate decanting and recharge pond, to collect stormwater; and a sump to maintain the groundwater below the quarry floor.

"Water pumped from the quarry can be recharged via infiltration trenches, excavated through the shallow overburden, to the bedrock surface," the Lowndes application says.

But FORCE's hydrology expert describes the water recirculation plan as "not reasonable" because the amount of water needed to be put back into the ground will be greater than what will be flowing into the pit.

Both sides will have a chance to state their case at Thursday's meeting.



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