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## Digging for answers

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When it comes to raising the hackles of rural communities, there are two subjects that are guaranteed to do exactly that - landfills and quarries.

I have seen it many times during my career as a reporter. Someone comes along with a plan for a landfill or quarry in some seemingly remote rural area and the next thing you know, there are huge crowds at planning meetings protesting the proposal. It's not really surprising when you think about the impacts of these plans. In many ways, the potential effects mirror each other - groundwater, traffic and environment concerns. No one wants a quarry or a landfill in their neighbourhood, giving rise to the now well-known acronym, NIMBY, meaning "not in my back yard."

All pros and cons aside, we all must admit - at least all of us who drive a car and bring the garbage to the curb every week - that we're part of the problem. We drive on roads that cannot be constructed without aggregate; we live in houses that need aggregate; we send our kids to schools that need aggregate, and on and on.

So, the dilemma is where do we get our stone and gravel if no one wants a quarry in their neighbourhood? Do we stop building roads, homes and schools? Do we get it, as some suggest, from existing pits and quarries, expanding them as much as possible rather than opening new operations?

Last week, at a public information meeting organized by the City of Hamilton, there was four hours of discussion about the proposed Mountsberg Quarry planned for northeast Flamborough. About 400 people packed into Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic School to hear about the planning process and ask the city to reject the proposal.

There are many solid reasons why the quarry should be denied. The site is adjacent to more than 200 homes whose residents have legitimate concerns about groundwater quantity and quality, noise, dust, vibration and truck traffic. It cannot be argued that their quality of life won't be negatively impacted if a 68-hectare quarry is allowed to locate in their neighbourhood.

Graham Flint, chair of FORCE (Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment), a well-organized group opposed to the quarry, has stated more than once, "No reasonable person would approve a quarry on this site." He backs his assertion with all kinds of data that 'no reasonable person' can overlook. And yet, the planning process moves forward, partly because the city is bound to allow the applicant, David Lowndes, a fair opportunity to state his case for a quarry. Lowndes and his environmental engineering consultant Bob Long were at last week's meeting to present their side of the story.

They say that impacts can be mitigated and the type of limestone they want to extract from northeast Flamborough is the high-grade variety and it's in short supply. It's close to the surface at the Flamborough site and that's one of the reasons they chose it. They also note there are positives connected with the proposal. The quarry will create 110 jobs and generate \$11 million in economic activity, including \$215,000 in annual taxes to the city .

For the hundreds of residents in Flamborough and nearby Milton opposed to the quarry, the economic benefits aren't nearly enough. So where does that leave Lowndes? If it was just a case of finding another site in some other part of rural Ontario, he probably would have already packed up and moved on. But clearly

that isn't the case.

No matter where Lowndes plans to put a quarry, he will meet opposition. He has decided to make a stand here. The process is now two years along and could go another two or three years before an outcome is reached.

Neither side of the dispute is willing to throw in the towel. They've both vowed to see it through to the end. I guess it's just another example of what a free and open process is all about. The important thing is to weigh both sides of the argument and come to a just decision. That's not going to be easy.

But who ever said good government would be, or even should be.



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