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Quarry proposal tests the strength of the greenbelt

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Published on May 26, 2006

The strength of Ontario's greenbelt protection legislation will be tested by the Mountsberg Quarry application. That assertion came last week from Rick Smith, the head of a national environmental charity called Environmental Defence, and a special guest at the second annual meeting of FORCE (Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment).

About 120 Mountsberg and Campbellville area residents attending the meeting learned that FORCE, a grassroots citizen's group that has opposed the northeast Flamborough quarry from the start, has formed a partnership with Environmental Defence. The two groups have a common cause—to stop Lowndes Holdings Corporation from opening a 68-hectare quarry on the northeast corner of 11th Concession Road East near Milburough Line.

The quarry application is the first of its kind involving greenbelt lands since the province enacted the Greenbelt Act last year. Although the new legislation doesn't prohibit quarries in the greenbelt, it puts stringent conditions on approval.

"We're now in the implementation and interpretation phase (of legislation protecting the greenbelt)," Smith, a Toronto zoologist, told the Review last Thursday night after speaking at the FORCE meeting. He talked briefly about the group's recent partnership with FORCE and their objective to protect natural heritage features and groundwater. He also charged that the Lowndes' quarry application not only flies in the face of the Greenbelt Protection Plan but is also contrary to the province's proposed Clean Water Act.

"Why are we interested in working with you?" Smith said to the crowd. "We're interested in working on precedent-setting cases. This fight, here, is important to the province and the country," he stressed.

Besides aligning its people resources with FORCE, Environmental Defence will also be helping out financially, Smith said. That was welcome news to area residents, many of whom have doled out their third \$500 donation to the cause in recent weeks. Last year, FORCE spent about \$80,000 on fees for technical experts and legal advice in their ongoing fight against the quarry. In 2004, the group spent just over \$100,000. The bulk of the funds were collected locally from the owners of the close to 200 homes near the proposed quarry site. Additional money came from area businesses and a fund-raising raffle.

Tom Weinstein, FORCE's volunteer and fundraising chair, reported that the first five months of this year have been fruitful, with about \$35,000 being donated by area residents. More was pledged at the annual meeting.

"We need to stay engaged," FORCE chair Graham Flint told the crowd, encouraging them to continue turning out in high numbers for public meetings, like the 450 people who crowded into the recent session at Our Lady of Mount Carmel School in Carlisle. He also urged residents to continue their support of the lawn sign campaign and to stay informed of the latest developments by visiting the group's website, www.stopthequarry.ca

Earlier in the evening, Flint launched an attack on virtually every part of the Lowndes application, including its hydrogeology studies, haul route plan and environmental impact studies.

"It's clear they've proposed something but they have no science to back it up," he said, noting that the company's latest proposal to mitigate the expected daily use of up to 3.6 million gallons of groundwater for

the quarry operation hasn't been proven to work in an area that has similar features to the Mountsberg Quarry site.

At the Carlisle public meeting, Lowndes' engineering consultant Bob Long contended that a groundwater recirculation system will cause only "a minimal loss" of water in nearby wells. "Our research shows that with proper water management in place, those wells will not be adversely affected," he stated.

An on-site demonstration of the recirculation system will be conducted this summer and there will be an opportunity for public review and comment, Long added.

But area residents remain unconvinced. They argue that there is no evidence to show that the mitigation system will prove effective.

While Flint outlined many reasons for denying the quarry application, including the proximity of almost 200 homes to the site and the presence of environmentally sensitive areas and the wellhead protection zone (which feeds area water wells and the communal well in Carlisle) on the quarry site, he also took aim at the proponent's case. He rejected their argument that the province is running out of aggregate when it is known that Canada exports aggregate. He also refuted the proponent's claim that the proposed site is designated for a quarry. Part of Flamborough's Official Plan talks about mineral aggregate being present on the site, he said, but it identifies sand and gravel as being in the area as opposed to the limestone aggregate that the proponent wants to extract.

As for the economic benefits announced by quarry proponents, including \$11 million of economic activity and 110 full-time jobs, Flint said the benefits will be outweighed by the expenses incurred by the city if a quarry is allowed to locate on the site. These include policing, road maintenance and bylaw enforcement costs.

Given all of the science-based arguments against the quarry that FORCE has presented, Flint concluded, "If this one passes the test, we don't know how you can say 'no' to a quarry anywhere."

Smith made a similar observation. Given that the wellhead protection area and natural heritage features of the greenbelt are on the proposed quarry site, "they can build anything anywhere, if Lowndes can build a quarry there," he said. "The new Clean Water Act says wellheads need to be protected," Smith said. "That is the lesson of Walkerton. That fact alone should derail this application."

The proponent was not present at the meeting to argue its case, but will be able to do so at upcoming public meetings.



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