

Groundwater protection key concern in quarry fight

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Opponents of the proposed St. Marys Flamborough Quarry are adamant that until St. Marys Cement (SMC) proves that the proposed quarry won't negatively affect groundwater in northeast Flamborough, the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) should not deem the aggregate company's application for a quarry licence as complete.

In hopes of getting support from the top, the chair of FORCE (Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment) last week sent a letter to Ontario's Natural Resources Minister Donna Cansfield asking that she ensure "a comprehensive review" is undertaken to determine if the application is complete, specifically in relation to the company's hydrogeological report contained in the application package.

"Accurate hydrogeology work is critically important to us," Graham Flint notes in the letter. "In our area, groundwater is the only source of potable water." He also stresses that community residents want the company to complete a round of pump tests, to the satisfaction of the Ministry of the Environment (MOE), to prove that the quarry operation won't impact the quality and quantity of area groundwater.

St. Marys filed an aggregate licence application with the MNR on January 22, the same day that they announced they would not repeat the first round of pump tests after the MOE dismissed results from July tests as unreliable because of heavy rainfall.

Jennifer Tuck, a St. Marys official, said last week that the company will need to apply for a permanent Permit to Take Water (PTTW) from the MOE before it can operate a quarry and the ministry will then have an opportunity to outline its requirements for approval. But Flint maintains the testing, which includes a trial run of the Groundwater Recirculation System (GRS) touted by the company as an effective measure in mitigating groundwater impacts, needs to be done before the MNR determines if the licence application is complete. "It's like trying to deal with a moving target," he said this week, referring to opportunities given to the company to abandon and re-open testing or modify documents to satisfy requirements of ministries at varying stages of the process.

Flamborough councillor Margaret McCarthy described the process as "fundamentally flawed." She, too,

believes the quarry proposal shouldn't get ministry support. "If this quarry (application) is considered complete, what on earth would qualify as complete?" she said, noting that public agencies have consistently said that the company's technical reports are incomplete. The City of Hamilton is still reviewing St. Marys application for an Official Plan Amendment and rezoning of the proposed quarry site on 11th Concession Road East and Milborough Line.

The MNR has 20 days from the filing of the application to determine if it is complete. The decision will be made at the ministry's district office in Guelph, where the application is currently under review by aggregate technical specialist Diane Schwire.

"If the application complies with provincial guidelines," Schwire said the company will be required to advertise and hold a public meeting and the application package will be circulated to review agencies, including the MOE, for feedback.

The process that follows a time line of two years is "proponent driven," she said, meaning that SMC is required to fulfill a number of steps before the MNR decides whether to approve or reject its application.



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