



Quarry opponents urged to keep fighting

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Opponents of the Flamborough Quarry were advised last Tuesday not to assume that their battle is over despite the Ontario government's unprecedented decision two months ago to freeze the zoning on the proposed quarry site to agricultural and conservation management.

While the zoning restriction has "changed the landscape of our battle" and is seen as a positive turn of events in countering the St Marys Cement (SMC) proposal, FORCE (Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment) chair Graham Flint cautioned area residents not to let their guards down. "We're not done yet," he told a crowd of over 100 attending the sixth annual meeting of the anti-quarry group at the Lawson Park Family Camp Resort on the 11th Concession, just down the road from the proposed 150-hectare quarry site.



GOOD SIGN: FORCE chair Graham Flint (left) and former World Wildlife Fund Canada president Monte Hummel show their opposition to the proposed Flamborough Quarry.

Since the zoning freeze was announced, the aggregate company has taken two clear steps indicating that it is not ready to concede defeat. In May, the company asked that the freeze be revoked and that the matter be referred to an Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) hearing for a decision. The company also filed an application last month for a permit to take water (PTTW) to conduct pump tests on the site.

Both steps are seen by FORCE, a community group opposing the quarry, and its lawyer Chris Barnett as signs that the company plans to go ahead with its aggregate licence process despite heightened opposition.

Another indication of the company's persistence to proceed came just four days before the annual meeting when it filed an appeal with the Environmental Review Tribunal (ERT) after the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) denied its PTTW application on June 3, citing the zoning freeze and its resultant barrier to establishing a quarry on the property as its reason.

Barnett, who was a guest speaker at the meeting, said the timing and scope of the OMB hearing has yet to be determined, but its duration is dependent on the quarry's applicant and St Marys has "clearly signaled" that it's not backing away from its plans.

"The involvement of the community is really important," Barnett stressed. "You have to stand firm."

A similar message came from another guest speaker, the former World Wildlife Fund-Canada president Monte Hummel, who lauded FORCE for its work in "helping to win one for the planet" by fighting to protect the community's water source. "You're at a critical point in your battle," he told the crowd. "You need to stay engaged and to stay well-funded," he advised while warning that OMB hearings "can be long and costly."

Noting that victory in environmental battles can never be taken for granted, Hummel, who is also a member of FORCE's Expert Strategic Advisory Committee, recommended that quarry opponents "stick together to see this thing through." To be victorious, "perpetual vigilance" is needed, he stressed.

Noting that public awareness and support of environmental issues has grown markedly in recent decades, Hummel said, "So, the environment is no longer anti-business agenda." He alluded to the Gulf of Mexico oil spill as an example of how strong public opinion can become when the environment is threatened. "If a company is not prepared to do the right things, be it St Marys or BP, we need to take them on," he said.

FORCE members and other quarry opponents have maintained throughout their battle with proponents of the proposal that a quarry in northeast Flamborough would represent a serious threat not only to local groundwater but also to provincially significant wetlands and sensitive environmental features in the area.

At the close of the annual meeting, Flint told residents that FORCE has a war chest, or OMB hearing reserve fund, of \$340,000 but more donations are needed because the funds “will go in a heartbeat” with hearing costs averaging \$10,000 a day.

Not knowing what the scope of the hearing will be until it is determined by the hearing chair, the group might be faced with huge costs should it go 40 or more days, Flint said.

“We will not have time to raise money in the middle of a hearing,” he warned.

The issue could be in its pre-hearing stage as early as this fall.

Its scope is a concern because St Marys is expected to push for a hearing that will look at the entire aggregate licence application, not just whether the province acted within its jurisdiction by imposing the zoning freeze.

Timing is also a concern, Flint told the crowd, because the zoning freeze was ordered by Ontario's Liberals, the province's governing party, and a provincial election is slated for next year. A change in government before the OMB hearing is complete could jeopardize support from Queen's Park for rejection of the quarry.



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