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Thursday, February 12, 2015 - 3:03:22 PM

Gravel pits not a matter of just digging them up

Re: Peter Zess letter "Why the big fuss over gravel pits?"(Tribune, Jan.15)

Your reader questioned the widespread community concerns that seem to exist regarding proposals for gravel pits and quarries. He offers up the superficial view, which pit and quarry proponents often use, that opposition is no more than NIMBY-ism, "spiteful and a little bit whiney."

What he fails to recognize apparently is that in the 20 or more years of extraction operations, before sites are rehabilitated into "very popular swimming holes" or beautiful lakes – if indeed they ever are rehabilitated – host communities are often forced to absorb significant tangible and intangible costs due to degradation of groundwater. Then there's intrusive and destructive blasting vibration, loss of property value, heavy truck traffic, dust emission, noise from blasting and crushing. There are agricultural and agri-food impacts, cultural heritage and visual impacts, and more.

Pit and quarry owners pay no more than nominal fees to host municipalities.

Zess's never having seen evidence of water pollution arising from pit and quarry operations suggests to me that he hasn't looked very far. The City of Guelph, for one, is seeking financial protection to offset any future costs arising from groundwater contamination due to the breach of the aquitard at the Guelph Dolime Quarry.

Zess's ridiculous assertion that heavy gravel truck traffic makes for better roads warrants a visit to downtown Acton. It is facing the possibility of 26 additional trucks per hour, six days a week. They'll be trundling along Highway 7 and Regional Road 25 through the downtown should the Rockwood "Hidden Quarry" be implemented.

What lies behind community resistance to many quarry proposals, as exemplified by the Rockwood case? It takes considerable effort to thoroughly vet the social, scientific and technical issues involved in ensuring that no unacceptable negative impacts will be caused by the quarry operation. It is in a provincial legislative and regulatory context that is still decidedly biased towards aggregate extraction.

In fact, the provincial government benefits most from the low cost and easy access to aggregate mining, since it purchases more than 75% of Ontario's aggregate products. In view of the number and capacity of existing licensed operations in Ontario, even the need for the development of new aggregate resources is not a given. Proponents are not obliged to demonstrate that such need exists.

What Zess gets right is that this area has lots of gravel and stone underground. But his conclusion that we should just dig it up wherever it exists reveals a total lack of understanding of the complexities of these cases. The value of communities and that environment stand to be degraded.

Doug Tripp
Rockwood

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