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Residents pack hall to voice opposition to proposed quarry near Rockwood

by Chris Daponte

ROCKWOOD - One by one residents from in and around Rockwood rose on Monday night to speak in opposition to a proposed quarry east of the village.

Over 200 people attended the March 25 public meeting at the Rockmosa hall, and of the 30 or so who spoke at the event, not one was in favour of the James Dick Construction proposal.

"We don't believe there's enough benefit here," said Bill Hill, who owns a farm close to the 39 hectare (100 acre) James Dick property at the northeast corner of 6th Line and Highway 7.

"An open pit has no place in this community," Hill later added.

He said locals have much invested in the community, having built their homes and lives in the area, "only to have this ugly proposal put in front of them."

James Dick Construction is seeking an aggregate licence from the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) as well as a zoning amendment from Guelph-Eramosa Township that will allow the company to proceed with the proposed pit.

Expected to produce about two million tonnes (700,000 annually) of sand, gravel and dolostone, the quarry will cover about 25 hectares (61 acres) of the property.

Vice president Greg Sweetnam said James Dick Construction is committed to being a good neighbour, but when he reiterated his stance that property values in the area will increase over the 20-year life of the quarry, many in the audience responded with laughter or incredulity.

"You're trying to flimflam us," Jack Greatorey said, adding that even if true, many in the audience won't be around in 20 years to witness the purported rise in property values.

Rockwood resident Vic Johnson wasn't buying Sweetnam's assurances either, noting that historically property values will always rise.

"I believe the whole of Rockwood should be concerned about this," Johnson said, referring to the pit's possible effect on ground water quality.

Using the example of a recent flash flood on Harris Street in Rockwood, Johnson said trying to get repairs for any possible damage to homes or water from the pit could be "a soul-destroying experience."

Sweetnam said his company is willing to do testing on private properties - both for sound and water quality - to ensure quarry operations such as blasting are not having a



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detrimental impact on neighbours.

“Aggregate extraction is not a threat to drinking water,” said Sweetnam. “Aggregates and drinking water go hand in hand.”

He also noted blasting at the site, which could be tailored to the community’s wishes, will be “way, way below the limit” for noise and vibration. Sweetnam added the site is surrounded by trees, and blasting underwater will further mitigate the impact of sound, vibration and dust on neighbours.

“If you live in Rockwood, you’ll never know this quarry is there,” Sweetnam said at one point in the four-hour meeting.

That statement was met with loud objections and a few laughs from the audience.

John Crompton in particular questioned that assertion. He said he regularly feels the blasts from an Acton pit located about four kilometres away at his Milton home, located about 3km south of Highway 7.

Rockwood resident Dan Kennaley said residents need protection and it’s likely up to the township to fill that role since “no one has faith” in the Aggregate Resources Act or the MNR.

Historically the application process for aggregate operations is “tilted” too much in favour of applicants, Kennaley said, but the recent Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) rejection of pits proposed in Puslinch Township (the Aikensville pit) and Caledon (Rockfort quarry - also a James Dick application) provide some hope for residents.

Kennaley said the Rockwood proposal from James Dick should be rejected for the same reasons its Rockfort quarry was turned down.

He also noted it appears some of the paper work submitted by James Dick was incomplete or done improperly.

Sweetnam replied his company has submitted all the required material and the application was already deemed complete by the township’s planning advisor, Cuesta Planning Consultants.

Darrell Millington, who lives within one kilometre of the James Dick property, said he is “really scared” about the pit proposal, which he called “wrong on all levels.”

He was particularly concerned about the impact the operation might have on local residents, horses and livestock.

“Don’t choose dollars over us,” Millington said to township councillors.

Several other residents also asked councillors if they would protect residents, including setting aside funds should the case go to the OMB.

Mayor Chris White said the township can not predetermine its decision, noting there is a process council must follow. If the municipality rejects the zoning application it has to be for legitimate planning reasons, White explained, and not simply because people don’t like it.

Wayne Wilson, who lives on the Eramosa-Erin Townline, said he drives a school bus in the area and he has to wait up to five minutes some days to turn right from the 6th Line onto Highway 7.

He said the traffic at peak hours will make the left turn required for gravel trucks very difficult.

Others said it’s unlikely drivers will stick to the Highway 7 to Regional Road 25 to Highway 401 haul route, choosing instead to take more rural roads, which were not made to handle the truck traffic, in order to bypass Acton.

Sweetnam said his company insists that employees drive safely and follow the designated haul route. He added his company will be doing work to improve the 6th Line and Highway 7 intersection, including regrading to remove a hill and paving a portion of the 6th Line.

Several residents said work on the road will not make up for major impacts the pit could have on air and water, as well as noise levels and the enjoyment of their properties.

“This area is a breath of fresh air, literally,” said one woman who identified herself only as Natalie. “Who in their right mind wants to put a hidden quarry there?”

September 18

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Highway 7 meeting Aug. 4

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Sweetnam noted the company blasts once a week at most, and possibly as infrequently as once a month.

“It’s a few seconds of impact per year, literally,” said Sweetnam.

Hydrogeologist Stan Denhoed, a James Dick consultant, said the quarry will not impact local water quantity or quality.

“I have not found examples of water contamination from this type of process,” Denhoed said. He later added, “There are going to be no dry wells, anywhere.”

Mayor Chris White closed the meeting by telling residents they would be informed when council will be considering the final report from Cuesta Planning and making a decision on the zoning bylaw.

Mike Davis, of Cuesta Planning, said he expects the final report will take longer than a month to prepare.

March 29, 2013

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