

CRC: Enough aggregate already in Ontario for next 50 years

By: Vivien Fleisher

Rockwood's Concerned Resident's Coalition (CRC) has a new member: campaign manager Mike Balkwil, whose past success includes winning a fight with the Mike Harris government over moldy school portables in the late 1990's. With the rescheduled Local Planning Appeal Tribunal (LPAT)—formerly the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB)—hearings set for May 2019, and a deadline of January 2019 to declare their issues and line up experts, the urgency is building. They've raised \$497,241 through events, donations and membership fees. But, expenses have consumed \$435,837. The first set of hearings in October 2016 was derailed by James Dick Construction Ltd.'s (JDCL) procedural error, when they failed to notice that Guelph/Eramosa Township had replaced its entire set of bylaws. They reapplied, while CRC had to keep fundraising to keep their lawyer and experts on idle while dates were rescheduled.

JDCL wants to quarry dolomite below the water table on a parcel of assembled land just north of Highway 7 between Acton and Rockwood,

requiring a zoning change on top of the required licence to extract. CRC's concerns include hydrogeology, hydrology, blasting impacts, air pollution, threats to habitats and species at risk etc. Halton Hills worries about the increase in truck traffic, given that a provincial highway forms the main street in both Rockwood and Acton.

CRC's Michelle Dawe opened the meeting by saying "It's been six years. Really, it's beginning to be a bit like family." Before introducing Balkwil, members Alex Kanarek, Doug Tripp, Linda Sword and Dan Kennaley took turns citing facts and dispensing plenty of food for thought. Kennaley said Ontario has over 6,000 licenced pits and quarries that produce two billion tonnes per year, yet the annual consumption is less than 10 per cent of production capacity, calling into question the need for new quarries. Linda Sword recalled how JDCL called CRC a "hate group" at the start, and predicted they wouldn't last. Alex Kanarek implored residents to "listen carefully. Only you can write the final chapter in this story." But perhaps Kennaley said it best by asking, "Doesn't it seem a little crazy that citizens have to raise money to protect our environment and fight the government, to which we pay taxes, whom we elected with the expectation that they would protect our environment and the community?" He also pointed out the cynical ploy used by JDCL about saving the environment by having material close to the market, which in reality saves the company money in shipping costs.

Balkwil knows his way around contentious issues and how governments skirt them, handing off politically unpalatable decisions to bodies like LPAT and civil servants. By depoliticizing hot-button issues, they avoid the worst of the fallout. But Balkwil's greatest strength is breaking it down for residents into manageable pieces by pointing out that it's a matter of finding the

weaknesses, and hammering away. The CRC needs well over \$300,000 still to go into the hearings. Balkwil asked, "How do you eat an elephant?" and answered, "one bite at a time." He spoke of a classic government device—placing issues inside a "bubble" which favours development over the environment, while separating the public from the bubble. The only way to penetrate and affect change it is to "suit up" and go in, and once inside, be prepared to convince those inside why JDCL is wrong. He added it's important to draw a line, to stop JDCL now while they can, and make politicians do what they don't want to, and reinforcing the message that it's not over until LPAT is over. Residents, with the CRC's help, have to tell Doug Ford, why JDCL's Greg Sweetnam shouldn't be allowed to turn their environment into cash. For more emphasis, he implored the packed hall to "come down out of the stands", let them know the public is watching, and to always remember stories like Walkerton, adding that applications get stopped when companies make mistakes. And so far, his message did not fall on deaf ears. They raised over \$90,000 that night.