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Lowndes quarry application headed public meeting in the spring

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It may seem quiet at present, but the lull in activity surrounding the Lowndes quarry application is about to end. A status report presented to Hamilton's planning and economic development committee earlier this month revealed that the first phase of independent peer reviews of the applicant's supporting technical reports has been completed. Initial findings will be presented for public review on the city's website next month.

Also, by the spring of next year, the city will hold a public information meeting to present the initial results of the peer reviews, along with the comments of various local agencies and government stakeholders.

While the review process spanned the summer and fall months, the public profile of the proposed quarry on 11th Concession Road East has been low. Quarry opponent Graham Flint noted that quiet periods don't signify that opposition to the proposal has waned. Members of FORCE (Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment), a grassroots citizens' group which has been fighting the quarry for over a year, remains committed to its cause, he added.

Also, residents who have heard little about the application recently shouldn't assume that "we've just lost or given up," he warned. "Nothing could be further from the truth."

FORCE has not been idle. Earlier this month, the group chaired by Flint presented its environmental report to the city. The report focused on the natural features and aquatic biology on the proposed quarry site.

Last month, FORCE presented its community issues report, which concentrates on the socio-economic effects of the proposal, including noise, dust, and decreased property values. Last week, the group put seven of its technical reports into one consolidated package for delivery this week to the city-appointed Combined Aggregate Review Team (CART).

The group has also launched a revised website at www.stopthequarry.ca, which makes it much easier for visitors to find information and learn details of FORCE's case against the quarry. One of the site's new features is a traffic light, which signifies whether the quarry application is moving onward, the process has reached a point of change or if there is a need for "a call to action" from opponents to the plan.

Flint, who has studied copies of the preliminary peer reviews, said initial findings are encouraging and validate the group's concerns about the groundwater and hydrogeological impacts of the proposal. The reports support FORCE's assertions that the technical studies done for Lowndes Holdings Corporation are "incomplete and non-definitive," he charged.

In its summary report presented to the CART and the city this week, FORCE states, "We find the Lowndes Holding Corp. application, as submitted in September 2004 to be, at best, extremely preliminary and, in reality, to be incomplete with numerous gaps, omissions and inconsistencies." The report reasserts the group's opposition to the quarry stating, "It would be an incompatible land use within the established rural residential and agricultural communities."

Flint contends that the peer review findings vindicate FORCE's assertions. He added that the review of

Lowndes' hydrogeology report says, "There are notable errors and inconsistencies, as well as missing information, in the key documents reviewed."

The noise and vibrations review asks for more detail about the proposed quarry's operational plan and associated sound emissions and the transportation review concludes there are "no definitive conclusions or recommendations" provided regarding haul routes and the mitigation of truck traffic impacts, Flint added.

Despite FORCE's contentions, Hal Miettinen, a communication consultant for Lowndes, said company officials are confident the application is in order and proceeding as it should.

"It has been deemed complete by the city and a review process is underway which we support," he said.

Miettinen declined to comment when asked why FORCE's repeated requests to arrange a visit to the quarry site for its steering committee and technical team have gone unanswered by Lowndes officials. He pointed out, however, that the city's technical teams have had "full access to the site."

Stan Holiday, a senior planner for the city, described the peer review work as "an ongoing process." He said the findings to date represent the "first iteration" in the process. "They indicate substantial more work (that) the proponent will have to look at."

Stressing that there are "no recommendations at this point," Holiday said feedback on the initial findings will be received from members of the CART early next year. The public information meeting in the spring will be a checkpoint of "where we're at" in the overall review process, he added.

Early in 2006, the city will continue its consultation with the neighbouring municipalities of Milton, Burlington and Halton Region to determine the terms of reference for an overall transportation study to be completed by Lowndes Holdings.

The proponent will be required to undertake the study that will be reviewed as part of the quarry application along with studies on hydrogeology, noise and environmental issues.



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