

Province rules against quarry plan in agricultural area

The decision to retain the area's rural and conservation zoning even surprised activists

BY MICHAEL-ALLAN MARION
Ontario Farmer

Carlisle - Farmers, villagers and country residents are ecstatic at an unprecedented order from the Ontario government to halt an application by an aggregates company trying to establish a quarry in a heavily agricultural area northeast of Carlisle.

"It's an incredible thing to hear. We weren't expecting this kind of decision," Dan Curran-Blaney, a core member of the grassroots group Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment, said of the provincial cabinet's order stopping multinational firm St Marys Cement from its attempt to get approval to open a quarry in a cracked limestone area at 11th Concession and Milborough Line.

The quarry's proposed spot was in the northeast Flamborough portion of Hamilton, straddling the municipal boundary with Milton. It is home to a wide range of agricultural pursuits, including cash-cropping, livestock, equestrian and greenhouse operations.

The order, issued by Jim Bradley, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, declares the site must remain zone "rural and conservation management" in perpetuity.

"We shouldn't be popping the champagne cork just yet," said Curran-Blaney, who grows specialty hay for the area's equestrian sector. "There is an appeal process that the company can use. But it's quite a relief for so many people around here."

"It was truly an extended community endeavour that was necessary to pull this off," he said. "After six years of always having this in your face, we're so thankful about this decision."

Liberal MPP Ted McMeekin, who represents the area in his riding, Ancaster-Flamborough-Dundas-Westdale, said while making the announcement that the government was responding to a strong community concern about the potential impact of the

proposed quarry on ground-water supplying wells, wetlands and streams.

The provincial statement is a big win for FORCE, a 1,200-strong group composed of 250 farmers, as well as Carlisle villagers and rural residents. Still FORCE chairman Graham Flint advised that he expects some kind of legal action from the company.

"The stakes are high for such a large firm to just walk away easily," he said. "But there is understandably an air of joy in the community because the stress has been so great for six years, and the threat to the environment and the water supply is just too large."

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— Dan Curran-Blaney

"What a great teamwork approach. The citizens got involved in a big way and local governments supported us in a big way. It's refreshing to know that democracy works."

The outcome is a major setback for St Marys. The company had spent \$20 million preparing its proposal

for the heavily cracked limestone quarry land.

"St Marys expects to conduct business in Ontario within a regulatory framework that is clear and reasonable, and on that basis has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in this province," said John Moroz, vice-president and general manager.

"Given the strong economic and social potential of the Flamborough Quarry, and our investment to date, we have no choice but to examine legal options."

The uncommon ministerial zoning order gives the company 30 days to appeal. After that, the province has 30 days to declare a provincial interest in the issue.

That decision would come from cabinet. Such a favourable decision is likely, McMeekin hinted, noting that cabinet agreed to Bradley's order.

It has been six years since Lowndes Holdings shocked the area by announcing that it had assembled the property of two disused farms on 11th Concession and applied for a quarry licence. Two years later, Lowndes sold its interest to St Marys, which vigorously pursued the license application with the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Residents formed FORCE, which opposed the licence application, citing concerns over water, noise and dust.

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