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Process for dealing with quarries flawed: Miller

John Burman

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Backwards provincial planning is one reason the cumbersome approval process for new quarries is skewed toward the gravel industry.

Gord Miller, Ontario's environment commissioner, said yesterday planners decide where millions of people will live and what highways they will need before considering what natural areas should be protected. They ought to decide where the aggregate for roads and concrete will come from first.

Ontario and its municipalities are the largest consumers of aggregate, Miller told Hamilton city council, and so it is to their advantage that the quarries be close to growth areas to keep shipping costs down.

To make matters worse, he said, municipalities do not really have any say in the approval process.

But the cost of that policy is that residents and industry are pitted against each other for years, he said, to loud murmurs of approval from Flamborough residents fighting St. Marys Cement plans for a limestone quarry on 11th Concession East at Milborough Road.

"Ontario is not going to run out of rock," said Miller, adding the province might have to get the 175 million tonnes of aggregate it uses each year from farther away. He said that would take the pressure off the Niagara escarpment and cool fights but it would cost more for gravel.

Miller, invited by council to speak on sustainable development, said provincial plans for four million more people around the Golden Horseshoe don't seem to account for the fact those people will add about two million more cars. Ontario's density targets for growth aren't high enough to "break free of car dependency" even though public transit is considered a priority.

jburman@thespec.com

905-526-2469

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