

CORE concerned about road safety

July 8th is an important day for members of Conserve Our Rural Environment (CORE) a ratepayer's organization that monitors proposed land-use changes in Mulmur Township.

The group, opposed to the Arbour Farm aggregate application to extract below the water table from the east side of Airport Road south of County Road 21 for road safety reasons, will request party status at the July 8th pre-hearing at the Mulmur Township offices. CORE's mandate is to ensure new developments are compatible with Mulmur's rural environment; the group believes that the application to extract is a grave traffic safety issue.

Arbour Farms has been pursuing a rezoning of its site and applying to obtain a license to extract aggregates from its property. Mulmur Township Planner Tracey Atkinson says Draft Official Plan and Zoning amendments were presented to Council for consideration, but the Council did not make a decision on the amendment applications by Arbour Farms. As a result, the applicant has gone to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB.)

CORE Board Member Alistair Crawley says the group anticipates the Ontario Municipal Board will address procedural matters, at the July 8th pre-hearing, such as establishing the parties and participants to the proceeding and scheduling future pre-hearing conferences.

He says, CORE will request party status at the pre-hearing conference and at the appropriate time we will draw our serious concerns about the impact on public safety and other issues with the Arbour Farms application to the attention of the Board. Mulmur Council may be stuck between a rock and a hard place. They need to deliver a study that sufficiently backs citizens concerns to consider a fight at the OMB where costs to oppose the proponent could run into hundreds of thousands of tax dollars. But, the ultimate cost of tragedy will out-weigh the cost of prevention should road concerns prove to be legitimate and lives are lost. In light of that, CORE has consulted with traffic consultants to highlight the serious deficiencies in the applicant's traffic studies and to delineate what type of measures must be taken to ensure the on-going safety of school bus and other traffic on Airport Road. According to their studies to date, CORE believes these should include climbing lanes in at least four significant valleys between Hwy 9 and County Road 21, so that users of Airport Road can safely pass these trucks as they crawl up these hills.

When asked whether or not the Township or County had the right to dictate what they deemed to be a safer haul route for aggregate trucks, Township Planner Tracey Atkinson replied, The Ontario municipal board will be the approval authority. It will be up to them to decide whether or not to approve the application. It is possible to include requirements such as a specific haul route. This too will be up to the determination of the OMB.

Deputy Mayor of Mulmur Township, Heather Hayes, says, We have heard from our ratepayers consistently over the span of time Arbour Farms has been working toward achieving an aggregate operation on Airport Road (County Road 18). Traffic safety and more specifically the potential for conflict between gravel trucks and school buses is an issue that is raised often. Citizen groups such as CORE have worked with those concerns from a grass roots level as Council has moved through the application process to get to this point. As the OMB hearings approach my hope is that the best interests of our ratepayers come out on top.

By Marni Walsh