

ARA and prime farmland focus of NDACT meeting

The Chair of the North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Taskforce (NDACT) Shirley Boxem, reports about 35 attendees were at the NDACT Annual General Meeting (AGM) at Horning's Mills Hall July 9th. The focus for the group, which was originally formed to oppose the development of a 2400 acre open pit mine in Melancthon, continues to be aggregate resource reform in the Provincial Policy Plan (PPP) to protect source water and prime farmland in Ontario.

Previous Chair and now very active NDACT board member, Carl Cosack gave an update on his consultations on the Aggregate Resources Act and some developments on how prime agricultural land might be protected in the near future. His report included: NDACT's engagement during the policy development process has been both encouraging and surprising. Science and aggregate were well represented along with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO) and various ministries.

Cosack says it is, Encouraging because despite the obvious tensions of conflicting goals the meetings were effectively run and provided real solutions. New ARA policy will be forthcoming this fall and I am convinced that it will be a huge improvement over the current ARA legislation, truly recognizing the need for aggregate as well as the changing social and political fabric that is today's modern Ontario with its real need for the serious protection of farmland, water and the preservation of nature's vast wealth to life. He calls it, Surprising because I have reason to have faith in the government agencies and their Ministers to find that balance and to recognize the engagement of tens of thousands of voters who demanded to be heard through their effective engagement in the Mega Quarry application, and the solutions that have been provided.

NDACT's AGM was informative and well attended, reports Cosack. These types of meetings can be a dry affair, yet this one was anything but; great questions and dialogue by those present, delicious food and refreshment made the time pass too quickly. Food and Water First continues to lead the way in encouraging people and organisations to be involved, aligning key requests of government to deliver a more powerful and vastly supported, message of careful planning, better communications and true focus on the common good.

Essentially, our hard work and the support of our faithful are truly paying off, says NDACT Chair Shirley Boxem. Everywhere there are signs of optimism. Municipalities and land use organizations are speaking with a common theme. This was evident in the submissions on the coordinated land use effort this spring. While the many letters were particular to the organizations, there were common threads throughout. As well, municipalities are saying they've had enough and are drawing firmer guidelines around land use policy, again with common themes. There will be policy feedback opportunities coming in the fall and everyone should stay tuned for next steps.

And Cosack says that support is growing, evident by the busy feed on Twitter. We know from our meetings at Queen's Park that YOU are being heard, he said. Please sign the Food & Water First Pledge and get involved, it is the final chapter of the Mega Quarry battle, let's see it through to the finish.

Sign the pledge @ www.foodandwaterfirst.com

By Marni Walsh