

NDACT closes registration for WELLness Check Program, prepares to sign pre-application agreement with Strada Aggregate

By Paula Brown

North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Taskforce (NDACT) is preparing to move into the next stages of their plans to protect residents and their water from a potential proposed quarry.

Earlier this month, NDACT closed its registration period for the WELLness Check Program and has announced plans for its pre-application agreement with Strada Aggregate.

Carl Cosack, media liaison for the grassroots advocacy group, shared an update with the Free Press on how key parts of the agreement process have unfolded thus far.

"We're a community organization looking out for the community and we spent a lot of time at front doors. We feel we have done the right thing for those who have concerns about what Strada is planning to do," said Cosack.

The WELLness Check Program is one of the key schedules in an agreement signed by NDACT and Strada Aggregate back in June of 2023. The program will assist with understanding existing environmental conditions, monitoring those conditions, and ensuring the proposed quarry, if approved for a licence, will have no adverse effects on the surrounding water wells and natural environment. The program will also see that should there be an impact on a well or natural feature, Strada would finance solutions.

By participating in the program, residents will give Strada Aggregate a baseline to reference the quality and quantity of their water if, in the future, there are any impacts brought on by quarrying below the water table.

One of the biggest misconceptions seen was that by signing up for the WELLness Check Program they were then giving "implied consent" for Strada's plans.

"They were fearful that Strada would use the signup as community support for their plans, and that's just not so," explained Cosack. "Even if you signed up, you can still object if there's an application filed."

Another deterrent for registering with the program is that many homeowners have made the decision that they would rather deal with Strada on their own, should any future problems arise.

Cosack said NDACT has tried to dissuade residents from this as the "aggregate resource act does nothing for protecting people" and the well program would act as "insurance for the homeowner."

"Should Strada ever file an application and should something not go right, in spite of all the effort to mitigate, they have committed in writing to be there and help people on their dime, not the homeowners," said Cosack.

"It's huge for community protection and a victory for the community."

Speaking with the Free Press, Cosack said that NDACT had 190 residents sign up for the WELLness Check Program from a group of 280 applicable residents, or roughly a 65 per cent registration rate.

"In the end, we feel people were quite willing to sign up once we explained the differences between what the Aggregate Resources Act will do for you and what Strada has done with the wellness program. It left me with the impression that they understood why this was all happening."

With the registration for the WELLness Check Program closed, the next step of the program will be having inspectors visit all the registered properties to compile the data in order to get a baseline reading of each well and water depth levels.

The next stage in the pre-application process for NDACT and Strada Aggregate will be a peer review of studies on hydrogeology, blasting noise, and air quality.

?NDACT has retained peer reviewers and they are looking at the studies Strada is currently providing,? said Cosack.

If Strada Aggregate moves forward with submitting a application to quarry, the information gathered through the studies will become public.

?People will be able to have a good look at the science behind the application through NDACT's peer review,? he concluded.

For more information about the NDACT and Strada Aggregate agreement, visit www.ndact.ca.