

Mega Quarry peer review ? should anyone be surprised?

Dear editor:

Recently, a peer review study of the Melancthon mega-quarry was released. Commissioned by the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority in response to the application by The Highland Companies to blast a huge hole into the prime farmland of Melancthon Township, the report by SLR Consulting (Canada) Ltd. would likely have remained unread, in a dead-file cabinet somewhere, if not for the efforts of someone (I know not who) in the NVCA. With the application withdrawn by The Highland Companies, there would not seem to be any reason to release this report. Some would say that there would little to gain. The truth is, there are some huge reasons for the release and understanding by the public of this report. The report results, and the lessons to be learned, should be known by all those concerned about the stewardship of our farmland, and all those involved in the massive effort to stop this travesty. The application, allowed through the Aggregate Resources Act, and following the guidelines within, was accompanied by voluminous reports commissioned by the proponent, and submitted to the MNR for review. That review process was suspended, I presume before its completion, when the proponent withdrew its application in November of 2012. We will likely never know what the conclusions, if any, of their review were. We should know. I expect that the MNR review would be a disappointment to all of us who worked so hard to stop, what was clear to us, a bad idea. As we learned in the battle to save our farmland and our community, the MNR and the Ministry of the Environment (and by extension, the Provincial Government), are not so concerned about protecting the land, as they are in finding ways to accommodate the developers. They are in the business of parceling out the land to anyone who comes before them with an application, an application supported by documents bought and paid for by the developer. Such documents should be truly suspect, as how can there be impartiality, and any trust in reports designed and manipulated to support the proponent's plans. This same framework still exists today. During the battle to save Melancthon, Mulmur, and the surrounding area, the view of common sense, freely and loudly offered by locals, was often discredited, and discounted, and not treated seriously by many people in authority. I mean, after all, what did we know in the face of the "scientific" studies conducted by so-called "experts" writing in these application reports. None of us were in a creditable position to dispute the findings of the people trained in the various scientific disciplines. But we all knew that the quarry was just plain wrong and would not work. (I remember a particular news reporter calling the effort to stop the quarry as "misguided?") That did not stop us, though, as we continued to scream our outrage at what was proposed. Now comes a report that essentially vindicates our efforts, and the end result of Highland's retreat. The technical review by SLR found many shortcomings in the proponent's reports. Here are a few conclusions of many taken from the review about the application reports: "...there is insufficient investigation, understanding or quantification of the environment for accurate determination of potential impacts or risk to the environment..." "...there is insufficient address of potential impacts to the environment in the event that the proposed perpetual groundwater recharge system fails or is abandoned." "Important data, analysis and cross discipline integration is lacking." "...the proponent's consultants deem identification and address of potential impacts virtually unnecessary." The SLR report does not come out to say definitively that this quarry should not be allowed to happen, but it does shine the light on so many deficiencies in the application studies that one has to wonder, "What was Highland thinking they could pull over on us?" What if Highland had not withdrawn their application? I shudder to think of what might have been. A link to the NVCA report can be found on the NDACT website.

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