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Amaranth, Mulmur mulling pits

There was public opposition voiced to two Dufferin County gravel pits, involving the north and the south of the county, both at the same time last Saturday.

The northerly pit would be on Airport Road in Mulmur. The southerly one would be on the Eighth Line of Amaranth. In both cases, the proponents are longtime property owners in each municipality.

Saturday's Mulmur event at Honeywood was the township's mandated public information session on required Official Plan and zoning amendments for conversion of the Adam Krehm-owned Arbour Farms to a below-water-table gravel pit.

The Amaranth event was proponent Jim Brown's information session for his proposed Eighth Line gravel pit.

In both cases as might have been expected, there was public opposition. But the strongest concerns were at the Mulmur session where the pit would be 20 metres (66 feet) below the water table, and the operation would be on a stretch of Airport Road that had 62 traffic fatalities in the past 25 years.

The Mulmur site is for about 42 ha to be licensed, with 36 ha of that the extractive area. Arbour Farms Planner Brian Zeman said there would be a buffer zone of 38.2 ha. The area, he said, had been mapped as ?mineral resource, and the quality of farmland was Class 4 to 7.

?It is not prime agricultural land. From a planning perspective (it is ideal for extraction).? He said it is also ideal from a social perspective as there are only a few houses within a kilometre, and it's not in a scenic area.

The crowd reacted in raspberry fashion to Mr. Zeman's statement that ?Airport Road was intended to accommodate high traffic volumes including trucks, and trucks (from the pit) would be a minor contributor.? There would be up to 16 trucks and hour, he said, ?eight in and eight out.?

But they applauded Dick Byford who said the Arbour promise not to ship on weekends ?doesn't accommodate people or school buses.?

Adjacent Lisle Creek is a coldwater stream and spawning ground. Residents were concerned not only with their own wells but also about the condition of the stream.

Mr. Zeman said extraction below the water table would be adjusted during drought conditions and at critical times for fish. Following the mining, the area would be rehabilitated to ?increased biodiversity.?

One speaker was incredulous that this would include a 21.4 ha pond according ot the planner. ?That's not a pond. It's a lake,? the speaker said.

Carl Cosack, appearing as an individual and a volunteer, said: ?I've had my fill of consultants. Everybody forgets about people. Why not put it to a binding referendum if you think people want (the pit)??

Don Woods of township consultant Cuesta said it is ?understood that not everyone is in favour.?

A resident questioned rehabilitation. ?There are 10,000 abandoned pits and quarries. It will take 325 years to bring them back (to normal),? she said.

Mr. Woods responded that he was also puzzled by the rehabilitation plan. ?Most abandoned pits on Highway 6 are a legacy of MTO. Only half a cent per ton goes into rehabilitation. It's not enough. Maybe (it should be) two cents a ton to find people to do the job.?

Brian Ward, also of Cuesta, said the province is putting an effort into rehabilitation, tightening controls and creating timelines.

Jane Pepino said the pit simply should not be approved until Airport Road is brought up to current standards.

Ms. Pepino is head of CORE (Conserve Our Rural Environment), which was formed in 2002 to oppose the gravel pit. She seized the opportunity to promote the organization and to point out the costs of fighting pits and quarries applications.

Meantime in Amaranth, the Brown pit is opposed, among others, by Paul Sullivan and Donna Garner who operate a horse breeding farm adjacent to the pit.

Mr. Sullivan said in an interview he wouldn't speak for his neighbours but had heard from many that they were concerned about traffic from a pit.

His own concern is for the effects a mining operation would have on his breeding of hot blooded horses, show jumpers and dressage, and in particular on mares with foals

He said the pit operation would be fairly close to his paddocks, where the horses would be, but the pit studies are relative to his barn where the horses would not be.

He said the couple had not been aware of a pit application when they moved to Amaranth from Lexington, Kentucky, at the end of February.

The pit would be on the east part of Lots 1 and 2, in the eighth concession, and would be licensed for 27 ha (66.7 acres).

Jim Brown's daughter Shelley Dodds said in a phone interview the site had undergone ?every test possible? since it was first considered as a pit about seven years ago.

She said the family has been here for the past 30 years and intends to remain here for at least another 30, so they don't intend simply to remove aggregates and then go away.

What about the water table in the generally wet Amaranth terrain? She referred the question to their hydrogeology consultant, Jay Flanagan, who said the pit would technically be below the water table as it is within 1.5 metres.

Nonetheless, he said, the ?pit floor would remain above the wetland, and there would be a 30 metre buffer from the wetlands at the south of the property.?

The township's public information meeting was scheduled for Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.

By Wes Keller