

Horning's Mills community continues to mobilize against Strada Aggregates? proposed mega quarry

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The fight against a proposed gravel pit in northern Dufferin County is entering a new phase, as residents packed the Horning Mills Community Hall this week for an update meeting with Melancthon Against Quarries focused on strategy, coordination and next steps.

The proposal by Strada Aggregates to develop a quarry site close to the rural village of Horning Mills has been a growing concern, with residents already well aware of the potential environmental and economic risks.

Those concerns were reiterated at the meeting on Monday, May 4, but the tone shifted to how the community can effectively push back. Support is strong, including on the municipal level, with Melancthon Mayor Darren White in attendance.

"I think it's potentially devastating for our water resources and some of our agricultural resources in the community to have below the water aggregate extraction in an area that is super sensitive to external inputs," he said. "It's important that the community groups that are opposing the Strada application set up something so people can know what's going on."

"I think it's also important that all members of council, or as many as possible, are at these things. And so far, I think almost everybody has been at every one of the public forums," White added.

Opposition to the project has largely centred on its proximity to homes, farmland and sensitive headwaters. Residents have repeatedly raised concerns about the potential for blasting to disrupt the area's limestone formations, potentially altering groundwater flow in unpredictable ways and impacting private wells.

Speakers also pointed again to the long-term implications of quarry operations, noting that projects of this scale can last decades and bring lasting changes to air quality, traffic and overall quality of life. Even modest impacts on property values, they said, could translate into significant financial losses for homeowners over time.

Larry Taman, who moderated the community meeting, said that a key concern raised was the developer's lack of experience. Community organizers said Strada has not previously undertaken a project of this nature, meaning it could effectively become responsible for managing local water systems without a proven track record.

"It's important to remember that Strada has never done this before, meaning they have no experience," he said. "If this goes ahead, we're turning our water supply, its management, over to someone who's never done this before. So in a situation in which outcomes are unforeseeable, losses are potentially very serious."

While those issues are not new, the meeting highlighted how the community's response is evolving.

Residents have now formally aligned themselves with a broader provincial network through the Reform Gravel Mining Coalition, a group that works with more than 20 communities across Ontario facing similar quarry and gravel pit proposals.

Representatives from the coalition, such as Mike Balkwill, attended the meeting to share lessons learned from other jurisdictions and outline realistic expectations for the road ahead.

He was blunt: the system is difficult to navigate and often favours development, but communities can still influence outcomes with

the right approach.

‘We have to be honest, it's very hard to stop them, the system is designed to say yes,’ he said. ‘It was bad enough before this government came into power, but Doug Ford has gutted all kinds of regulations? He's just removed as many barriers as he can.’

A significant portion of the presentation focused on strategy, particularly the dual-track approach needed to oppose a project like this. With the coalition's resources, they have a large portfolio of lessons learned and experience they are willing to share.

‘The Reform Gravel Mining Coalition is made up of 20 communities that are in various stages of fighting gravel pits or gravel quarries, just like you are,’ Balkwill said. ‘We work with all these communities to give them the best chance of protecting their community, protecting their health and safety and stopping the pit or quarry. That's what we try to do. What I'm here to do tonight is to share with you the best lessons from what we have.’

That includes participating in the formal approval process, including potential hearings before the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT), while also building sustained political pressure.

Balkwill stressed that winning on technical arguments alone is unlikely.

Instead, success often depends on whether opposition becomes visible enough to influence decision-makers at the provincial level.

‘Communities have no choice but to launch or participate in an OLT,’ he said. ‘It's the place where you have to go to fight these things into existence. Because the application process is designed to produce an approval, communities must also create political pressure.’

‘You also have to win in the court of public opinion, as well as in the court of law.’

Delaying the project was also identified as a key tactic.

‘Finding ways to stall the application as long as you can work in your favour,’ Balkwill said. ‘It gives you more time to build political pressure? it creates the possibility for surprises to happen.’

Municipal tools, such as bylaws, were discussed as one option.

The importance of a strong relationship between residents and local council was also emphasized. In this case, speakers noted that the municipality has already taken steps to support the community, including hiring legal counsel with experience in opposing aggregate applications.

Beyond legal and political strategies, organizers are also focusing on expanding grassroots engagement.

A newly developed website is being introduced as a central hub for information, volunteer coordination and fundraising, with the goal of moving from a small core group to broader community participation.

The group also announced it has rebranded as the Watershed Guardians of Dufferin County, a name meant to reflect a wider focus on protecting regional water systems, farmland and environmental health.

Throughout the evening, the message remained consistent: the risks associated with the proposed quarry are already understood, but the outcome will depend on how effectively the community responds. The more noise made, and the more support seen, the better the odds of opposing the quarry.

With the process expected to unfold over several years, residents were encouraged to stay involved, contribute where possible and

prepare for a sustained effort to shape what happens next.

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