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Export date: Fri Oct 30 7:57:58 2026 / +0000 GMT

NDACT?s former Peer Reviewer shares concerns

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

The North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Taskforce (NDACT) has released Garry Hunter from his duties as their Community Trusted Peer Reviewer as the Strada Aggregate quarry application moves into the next phase.

The local group announced the decision to discontinue Hunter's services in a press release on Monday (March 17), stating their goal of ?achieving clarity on the application has been achieved.?

?NDACT and this community owe a huge thank you to Mr. Garry Hunter, who has been NDACT's Community Trusted Peer Reviewer on the Strada Aggregate's Inc project for almost three years now,? wrote Carl Cosack, community liaison for NDACT. ?The engagement with Strada's consultants proved challenging at best, yet Garry gave selflessly and patiently of his expertise to defend this community's interests on the hydro-geology file.?

Hunter, who previously served as NDACT's Trusted Community Consultant during the failed Melancthon Mega Quarry Application from 2006 to 2012, issued his own press release on March 14 as a response to the ending of his term.

?My understanding is that I was terminated due to my strenuous objecting to Strada's filing of the Quarry Site Plan Application on January 31, 2025, and my direct request to Strada that the application be withdrawn and let the scientific process play out in accordance with the community engagement agreement, which I had supported throughout my retainer,? Hunter wrote.

In December of 2022, NDACT and Strada Aggregate signed a Community Engagement Agreement, which outlined that if peer reviews concluded the quarry would cause unreasonable adverse environmental effects, then Strada would not proceed with a formal application. If the studies showed the quarry would not cause unreasonable adverse environmental effects then NDACT would not object to the application.

In January, Strada Aggregate filed their application for a license to extract below the water table with the Ministry of Natural Resources; the first step in the Aggregate Resources Act (ARA) application process.

Hunter referred to Strada's decision to file a formal ARA Application prior to the hydro-geology review as ?heavy-handed? and ?a breach of the public trust.?

In his press release, Hunter criticized NDACT for failing to ?argue over the application being submitted? in order to preserve the community financial compensation of the agreement rather than water resource impacts.

?NDACT's deferral to Strada's breach of the Community Engagement Agreement combined with shooting of the messenger undermines the credibility of this agreement,? wrote Hunter. ?There can be little confidence that NDACT will not capitulate to Strada again with respect to protection of the Pine River Headwater and Horning's Mill Community Water Resources from the adverse environmental effects of the proposed Quarry Site Plans as filed by Strada.?

The Free Press reached out to NDACT for comment in response to Hunter's criticisms.

?Everyone forgets that this is a first-of-its-kind agreement, there is no blueprint to follow. There were going to be surprises to the agreement and things we had not considered, but you learn as you go along,? said Cosack. ?We're way more equipped now as a community than we would have ever been without the agreement. I make no apologies for having an agreement, and I make no apologies that it is not perfect.?

As part of his role as Community Trusted Peer Reviewer, Hunter published his six major issues associated with Strada Aggregates' proposal to quarry below the water table.

These concerns include:

? Dry weather groundwater and stream flows for the quarry are underestimated by two to three times.

? The diversion of Pine River groundwater stream flows to the Boyne River.

? Lack of consideration for water quantity management to maintain existing groundwater flows to the Horning's Mills community.

Hunter additionally noted issues with:

? The site plan not including any drinking water quality performance criteria for quarry contact and non-contact contaminated water.

? The site plans failing to incorporate geotechnical consultant contingencies.

? A groundwater monitoring network not being met for long-term quarry needs.

According to Hunter, there have been four rejected submissions to the Strada Aggregate regarding local concerns with the site plan application.

?The comment from the first peer review did not get grasped in a timely fashion and it kept escalating that we'd make the comments over and over again without a resolution,? Hunter told the Free Press. ?I lost confidence that they were going to take this seriously, other than to put it to adjudication and ignore the comments.?

The next steps in the process should include Strada Aggregate addressing the six main issues raised by Hunter in his report. Once Strada Aggregate has submitted its completed application, a notice will be posted giving the public 60 days to respond with letters.