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Residents raise concerns about Strada Aggregate Gravel Pit at public meeting

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Residents living close to the Strada Aggregate gravel pit in Melancthon had the opportunity to bring forward their questions and concerns on a wellness program created to protect their water quality and quantity.

Strada Aggregate hosted the public information session on Nov. 9 at the Horning's Mills Community Hall in Melancthon. The meeting was intended to advise property owners with wells and natural features within a three-kilometre radius of the gravel pit about the logistics of the WELLness Check Program.

?The turnout was great. The more people and the more questions, the better we can understand the concerns of the community and the better we can address those concerns,? said Kevin Powers, community liaison for Strada Aggregate. ?Meetings like this one are very important to us before we make our application, so that we can make our application better and ensure that it meets the needs of the people.?

The WELLness Check Program is one of the key schedules in an agreement signed by North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Taskforce (NDACT) and Strada Aggregate back in June. 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 the natural environment. The program will also see that should there be an impact to 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 concerns raised by residents during the information session was the fact that many of them had not been included in the ?target participation area?, while their neighbours had been.

?We looked at publicly available water wells records and assed where wells were installed based on those records. Some properties are shown to be installed in the same unit that we would potentially be taking water from on our property. There's the consideration that they could be linked and the potential impact for those,? explained hydrologist Alicia Kimberley.

Those same residents also raised concerns about having to cover the costs to fix their wells or natural features, even if Strada is at fault.

?Even if you do not sign up for the program, if there is a problem with your well and it is the fault of Strada because of its quarry operation, Strada is obliged by this agreement to immediately provide you with a continuous source of water until the reason is discovered. If the reason is Strada, they are on the hook for the cost of everything, event finding you a new source of water,? said Powers.

Speaking with the Free Press about the concerns raised by residents during the meeting, Powers said,

?Any concern is a fair concern, and we're happy to listen to them. A lot of people want to be involved in this program, and we're going to work with NDACT to determine whether or not to involve them more, but the more people that are involved, the better.

Strada Aggregate initially brought forward a presentation to Melancthon council in October of 2021, which noted their intention to submit an application for a proposed quarry. The Strada Aggregate quarry was proposed to be constructed in an existing gravel pit,

located in the area of 4th Line and County Rd. 17 in Melancthon, and designed to extract 2 million tonnes of aggregate while extending below the water table.

In June, NDACT and Strada Aggregate signed an agreement that gave NDACT input and decision-making into Strada's quarry application before being submitted. As part of the agreement, NDACT will not oppose the application unless the science shows the quarry could harm the environment.

The agreement between the grassroots organization and the aggregate company has been described as unprecedented by NDACT.

?Strada was under no obligation to engage with the community prior to filing an application. They could have conducted the required studies, filed the application with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and only at that point be obligated to provide landowners 60 days to review everything before launching an appeal,? explained Karen Wallace, chair of NDACT.

Registration for the WELLness Check Program closes on May 31, 2024, with well and natural feature inspection to be completed by June 30, 2024.