

Town pens letter opposing Strada Aggregates' water permit amendment

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The Town of Shelburne has officially submitted a formal response to Strada Aggregates Inc.'s application to expand and quarry below the water table, highlighting several local concerns.

The Strada quarry has been a hotly debated topic since it first appeared, drawing sharp criticism from local residents, politicians, and environmental experts.

Shelburne has specifically raised concerns about the amount of water the quarry will be drawing from the area.

"The Town of Shelburne has formally objected to Strada Aggregates Inc.'s application to the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks to amend its Permit to Take Water (ERO #: 025-1082)," reads a statement from the town. "The proposed amendment would allow Strada to withdraw up to 5 million litres of water per day for 10 years."

Five million litres of water is no small number. This level of consumption would be more demanding than the towns around the quarry itself. In fact, that level of demand exceeds the daily water use of all eight lower-tier communities in Dufferin County combined.

In a letter to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, Todd McCarthy, Shelburne Mayor Wade Mills noted there are existing water supply issues impacting the county.

"Dufferin County currently experiences significant issues relating to water supply and, in our opinion, the proposed amendment to the Permit to Take Water will only exacerbate the significant water supply issues present in the County of Dufferin," reads the letter from Wade Mills to McCarthy. "In Dufferin, the agricultural sector represents a significant portion of the county's economy and, as such, the protection of agricultural lands is paramount."

He continued by warning that should Strada Aggregates be granted this level of consumption, the local economy and food supply would be harmed.

"The Town of Shelburne understands that the availability of a safe and abundant water source is critical to farmers' production of crops that are not only produced in large quantities but are also of the highest quality," Mayor Mills wrote. "It is our belief that Strada Aggregates Inc.'s amendment to their Permit to Take Water will harm Dufferin County farmers' ability to produce crops in high yields and maintain the current standard of crops."

The problems raised by Mayor Mills don't end with the volume of water Strada has requested. The town has also raised concerns about the nature of the quarry and the fact that it will be digging below the water table.

Shelburne CAO Denyse Morrissey also objected to Strada's proposal to expand its quarry operation below the water table in a letter to Minister of Natural Resources Mike Harris. She expressed concern for the impact it could have on the environment and water quality.

"While we understand the importance of aggregate resource extraction, Strada Aggregates Inc.'s proposal for aggregate extraction below the water table is concerning for both the short-and-long-term prosperity of Dufferin County," she said. "Town of Shelburne's concern does not centre around the mere action of operating a pit and quarry, but, rather, it is the practice of below the water table extraction where our municipality's concern arises."

"This practice can be detrimental to local water systems, natural environmental heritage systems, and create harmful environments for surrounding residents," Morrissey added.

In her letter, she also questioned the potential impact of noise, debris, and vibrations from the quarry on the community. She said the type of deep digging this quarry proposes would exacerbate its byproducts to an even greater extent.

"While we can appreciate that no aggregate operation can eliminate any of the aforementioned by-products, it is our understanding that a below the water table operation greatly exacerbates those by-products," Morrissey wrote in her letter. "Local residents, therefore, will likely be subject to greater levels of noise, vibration, and noxious fumes, all factors that would prove detrimental to their overall quality of life and general safety."

"In our opinion, the reduction in residents' health and safety should not be viewed as merely an unfortunate outcome of the quarry expansion, but, instead, current residents' health and safety should be a minimum standard required to be maintained," the letter added.

Another concern stemming from Strada's proposed expansion is that trucking volume will further increase in Shelburne to a point where local infrastructure cannot support it.

"The submissions do not assess the impacts of trucking beyond the primary haul route; for example, the intersection of CR124 and Highway 10/89 in Shelburne which is the busiest intersection in the community, and a major existing and developing commercial node has not been assessed," she said. "Existing conditions along CR124 in Shelburne are not suitable to accommodate both the trucking activities associated with the haul route and the urban roadway / complete street needs of Shelburne."

As the comment period for the proposed quarry closed on Nov. 10, many questions raised by town officials, residents, and local experts remain unanswered.

Dufferin-Caledon MP Kyle Seeback issued a Letter of Objection to the Ministry of Natural Resources Aggregates Section, regarding Strada Aggregates Inc.'s application for a Class A license.

In the letter, he asked 24 questions regarding the application's environmental and hydrological concerns, community and economic considerations, transportation, infrastructure, residential and agricultural impacts, air quality, noise, wildlife, property, business, and overall safety.

"Dufferin-Caledon deserves complete and transparent answers. Residents have engaged in good faith to understand the implications of this proposed project. It is the responsibility of the applicant to match that good faith with full transparency and accountability. When an applicant fails to match that good faith, it is impossible for the community to lend its support," reads Seeback's letter of objection.

The Town of Shelburne said it will continue to ask questions, challenge Strada and the provincial government, and remain committed to ensuring transparency while advocating for community interests.