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Both sides of quarry battle set to dig in for the long haul

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"It's business as usual," said the chair of the grassroots citizen's group protesting plans for a quarry in northeast Flamborough.

Graham Flint of Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment (FORCE) was responding to news that the proposed quarry site on the corner of 11th Concession Road East and Milborough Line is no longer owned by Lowndes Holdings Corp. but is now in the hands of a major player in the aggregate industry, St. Marys Cement Group.

The change in ownership doesn't change anything with respect to local opposition to the quarry, Flint stressed during an interview this week. "The key issues as to the inappropriateness of the proposed quarry remain the same no matter whose name is on the signpost at the quarry gate," he declared. Flint expressed hope that there will be a more transparent and cooperative working relationship between FORCE and the new landowner than with the previous owner. Having a larger company at the helm might even work to the advantage of everyone concerned by moving the process along at a steadier pace, he suggested.

It has been more than two years since residents learned of plans for the quarry and almost two years since the former owner filed a land use planning application to extract aggregate from the site. While the process has moved ahead with reports being filed by both the applicant and FORCE, and the City of Hamilton receiving the results of a peer review study, there has yet to be a public planning meeting on the proposal. The city did host an information meeting in April, but many opposing the project voiced frustration at that meeting, as well as others, about how slowly the planning process is unfolding.

In an interview from his Toronto office on Monday, Richard Olsen, president of St. Marys CBM (Canada Building Materials), didn't commit to moving ahead at a quicker pace but said he hoped to move forward as quickly as possible. "We can only commit to following the process," he said, noting that the application needs approval from the municipality under the Planning Act and from the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) that provides the license to operate a quarry before it can move ahead.

Olsen said the company "absolutely" plans to move ahead with the application for the Mountsberg Quarry. "With our proven track record of producing construction materials using best environmental practices and our 90 years of experience in managing quarries in Ontario, we have the expertise to manage the project effectively," he said.

Olsen added that the Mountsberg project is important because "there are too few sources of close-to-market, high quality limestone that meet the standards and volume that municipalities and other consumers require."

"High quality aggregate has to come from somewhere," he stated. If it comes from areas far away from major markets, it has more of an environmental impact than if it is quarried nearby, he reasoned. "It means more trucks pass more people," if quarries are located far from markets, he said.

Flint doesn't dispute that the aggregate has to come from somewhere, but says there are several sound reasons why the Mountsberg site shouldn't become a quarry. The reasons that the site remains inappropriate for a quarry haven't changed, he said, reiterating the potential negative impacts of the operation on nearby water wells and on the wellhead protection zone that is the source of drinking water for the 3,000 residents of

Carlisle. Flint also spoke of protecting the provincially significant wetlands (PSWs) on the quarry site and preserving the natural heritage systems of the Ontario greenbelt that exist on the site.

Quarry opponents are also concerned about the inappropriate nature of rural roads for use as haul routes by quarry trucks and the impacts of noise and dust on the more than 140 adjacent householders.

"We anticipate no impact on the quality and quantity of water" in the area as a result of the quarry, Olsen said, noting that a recirculation system will be put in place on site. The public has a false perception that the millions of litres of water used in the quarry dewatering process are taken right out of the system, he said, explaining that the water is recirculated, not lost.

Groundwater recirculation testing will be done on the site this summer. "We will have a demonstration that this thing works," Olsen said.

Noting that "the technical aspects of this project have to be sound," the company president said of reports previously submitted by the Lowndes Corporation, "We will take a hard look at the work done to make sure it is up to our standards."

Over the next several months, St. Marys Cement Group will develop detailed site plans that will include proposed hours of operation, industry leading controls on noise and dust, minimizing the impact of traffic on the community and the depth of extraction. An immediate priority is the hydrogeological study to determine the best ways of avoiding impacts on water quality and supply.

Amendments to the original application due to the change of ownership are a minor formality. The application will continue from its current point.

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