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City eyes aggregate mapping update

Dianne Cornish

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Prompted by Flamborough Councillor Margaret McCarthy, Hamilton city council has taken preliminary steps toward updating mineral aggregate resource mapping in rural Hamilton. McCarthy recently persuaded fellow councillors to unanimously back her proposal to direct planning staff to "proceed expeditiously" on updating the mapping, which dates back to 1984.

"This is critical to us on several fronts," McCarthy said in a press release. "It speaks to the need to identify incompatible uses, in, on, and around the potential quarry site on the 11th Concession in Flamborough."

Existing aggregate mapping has been described as "misleading" by a grassroots community group called FORCE (Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment), who have opposed the Mountsberg Quarry proposal since it surfaced two years ago. In June, a report by Hamilton's director of long-range planning, Paul Mason, said the aggregate maps included in the city's Official Plans (OPs) are "clearly inadequate" because they include areas with substantial incompatible land uses as future sites of aggregate extraction while excluding other areas of significant resource potential that have few land use conflicts.

The original proponents of the quarry, Lowndes Holding Corp., said in an information booklet that the OP of Hamilton-Wentworth Region has designated the area of the proposed quarry as a mineral aggregate area since 1980 and the OP of the former Town of Flamborough has designated the area as mineral aggregate resource lands since 1988.

But FORCE chair Graham Flint and McCarthy both indicate that the regional plan designates the area as a sand and gravel resource location and not as a limestone aggregate extraction site as is proposed for the Mountsberg Quarry. The Flamborough plan doesn't differentiate between mineral resources on the site and the mapping is different between the two documents, added Flint. This all leads to a degree of "uncertainty" about the criteria used to determine where quarries should be located, he added. Upgraded mapping will present a clearer picture for both area residents and the new owner of the quarry lands, St. Mary's Cement, he said.

The new maps will be incorporated into the city's OP, which is currently being updated and harmonized into one document that will replace the seven OPs that have been in place since the surrounding municipalities including Flamborough, Dundas, Ancaster, Glanbrook and Stoney Creek were amalgamated with Hamilton five years ago.

McCarthy said the new mapping will identify constraints that will help municipalities determine early in the planning process where quarries can be located. She said staffers in Huron County, a large area running along the shores of Lake Huron from Sarnia to Port Elgin, updated aggregate resource mapping for nine municipalities within their boundaries. Working in conjunction with provincial officials, Geographic Information Software (G.I.S.) mapping experts and community groups, county staff completed the job in a year, she said.

Hamilton staff was directed by council to contact their counterparts in Huron County to get information on successfully completing the project. They were also told to contact the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines for assistance with the new mapping initiative.

The Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) has traditionally been responsible for producing aggregate mapping but refused to produce the updated maps, leaving the entire cost and associated justification

studies to the city, the recent planning staff report said. In 1986, the responsibility of mapping geological factors was transferred to the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines.

Planning staff was also directed to report back to the planning and economic development committee with appropriate timelines for the project's completion and its projected cost. The report will go to committee on September 5.

McCarthy estimated the mapping would cost between one and three million dollars. Council has not yet voted to finance the project.

"The investment and time required by Hamilton to complete this work was not part of the Rural Official Plan program," Mason wrote in his report.

Incompatible land uses uncovered in the new, updated mapping could impact plans for the Mountsberg Quarry at the corner of 11th Concession Road East and Milborough Line. Criteria identified through the mapping project won't be much different from the criteria used by the city to determine whether it will approve the rezoning and OP amendment needed before the quarry can proceed, Flint said.

McCarthy hopes that Hamilton will follow the established models set by Huron and Grey counties' official plans, which places several constraints on lands containing wetlands, woodlots and provincially designated Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA). McCarthy points out that the proposed quarry site in Mountsberg contains all three.

"There is also a wellhead protection zone running right through the property," she added.

John Moroz, vice-president and general manager of aggregate operations for St. Mary's Cement, said he was aware Hamilton is in the process of updating its OP but not sure of details connected with McCarthy's proposal for updated mapping.

"St. Mary's will participate in the process at the appropriate time," he wrote in an email last week.

Moroz and other senior officials with the quarry project have been knocking on doors to speak with residents in the Carlisle area in recent weeks. The company also hosted an open house on the quarry site this week.

Flint was critical of the company's approach to speak with residents on a one-on-one basis. He said St. Mary's officials have declined to attend an open community forum McCarthy has arranged for September 19 at Balaclava School.

"The meeting will be held in their absence," she said. "The updates will be substantive in terms of mapping, and we will present feedback from other sources."

Flint said the company's approach is one of "divide and conquer." He accused St. Mary's Cement of being unwilling to "expose their true colours" and undergo public scrutiny.

Responding to McCarthy's invitation, Moroz wrote, "We have declined to participate in the September public meeting as we do not have any new information to share at this time. St. Mary's is committed to working with the communities in which we operate and at this time feel that one-on-one conversations can help us to better understand concerns and provide specific information."

- with files from Brenda Jefferies



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