

MPP slams Liberals over quarry

BY DON REDMOND

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Andrea Horwath, the MPP from Hamilton Centre, has picked up the ball for opponents of the St Marys quarry application on the Flamborough-Campbellville border.

During the November 6 Question Period at Queen's Park, Horwath repeatedly challenged Environment Minister John Gerretsen to put an end to the application.

On hand at Queen's Park for Horwath's offensive were dozens of Flamborough, Campbellville and Burlington residents, as well as Graham Flint, Chair of Friends of the Rural Communities and the Environment (FORCE), Flamborough Councillor Margaret McCarthy and Milton Councillor Jan Mowbray.

McCarthy was thrilled that Horwath, a former colleague of hers at Hamilton City Hall, was willing to go into battle against the quarry. Horwath herself announced the next day that she would be in the running as the head of the Ontario NDP during the leadership convention in the spring.

"The one drawback is that Andrea is in the Opposition and really, it's only the government that can shut down this application," McCarthy told the Compass. "But the good thing is that now it's been brought onto the floor at Queen's Park and Andrea is very vocal, strong and determined. She can make sure this doesn't fade into the background."

McCarthy said Horwath's best ammunition was the Province's own Safe Water Act introduced at Queen's Park after the Walkerton tragedy.

"The whole purpose of that legislation was to screen out anything that poses a threat to the safety of drinking water," said McCarthy. "(Shutting down the St Marys' application) should be a no-brainer."

Indeed, that was precisely the argument used by Horwath on November 6 as she challenged Gerretsen and the McGuinty Liberals not to let the Greenbelt "become the Greed-belt" and implored the Grits to follow the recent advice of the Environment Commissioner of Ontario, Gord Miller, who suggested the Province start screening out quarry applications like St. Marys.

"The McGuinty government needs to look at the 'big picture' view to protect Ontarians' health and the environment," Horwath said during Question Period.

"That is why they passed the laws in the first place. Greenbelt and drinking water protection should not take a back seat to quarry development."

"Two thousand people from the area sent postcards asking the McGuinty government once and for all to stop this quarry, which is a real threat to the residents' water safety," Horwath said. "Will the Minister say today when the government is going to step in and stop the

quarry?”

Horwath then produced a letter sent to St Marys by the MOE on October 30, saying that the first rounds of water tests were deemed a failure by the Ministry “but allows St Marys a re-do.”

Likening the letter to a student’s report card, Horwath said, “If you are a student at school and you get an ‘F’ on a test, you fail. If you’re an aggregate company trying to develop a new quarry in the Greenbelt in a municipality’s drinking water protection area, you can keep getting ‘F’s, get more chances to redo your tests, and still make your way through the development process.”

Horwath’s Queen Park pitch was also lauded by FORCE chair Flint and Dr. Rick Smith, Executive Director of Environmental Defence, also in attendance.

“No ‘reasonable person’ would approve a new quarry in this location,” noted Flint, Chair and spokesperson for Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment.

“We call on the McGuinty government to walk the talk on its Greenbelt and Clean Water laws and stop this quarry,” added Smith. “If this quarry proceeds, no drinking water protection area or land in the Greenbelt is safe. Ontario has a real opportunity to lead the way by setting a green standard for the aggregate industry to help foster a green economy and green jobs.”

But Horwath’s push against the quarry application led for a handful of emails to McCarthy over the weekend, all asking the same question, she said.

“They all wanted to know where (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough) MPP Ted McMeekin was on the issue (since it’s in his riding). They want to know why Andrea is fighting this, rather than him.”

McMeekin is on record as being opposed to the application. However, McCarthy said, he hasn’t been “particularly vocal” about it at Queen’s Park.