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## Improve application process: Miller

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Ontario Environment Commissioner Gord Miller told Hamilton councillors this week that they can help meet the need for a provincial aggregate strategy by using their clout, as aggregate consumers, to sway the Ontario government towards adopting new planning processes for pits and quarries. Speaking at Tuesday's city council meeting, the commissioner suggested that Ontario municipalities, as "chief buyers of aggregate," could push for having a bigger role in the decision-making process about proposed quarry sites.

With close to 70 residents from northeast Flamborough and the Campbellville area looking on from the gallery, Miller made the comments in response to questions from Flamborough councillor Margaret McCarthy, who along with residents represented by a group known as FORCE (Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment), have been fighting a quarry application by St. Marys Cement for the Mountsberg area for the past four years, citing groundwater protection and the preservation of natural heritage features on the site as among their primary reasons for opposition.

Responding to McCarthy's questions about how council and citizens can help him to reconcile the planning conflicts when quarries are proposed despite potential environmental impacts, Miller said his recent annual report recommends that municipalities have a greater say over where new quarries can be located. He also noted that the current process for dealing with quarry applications is flawed and is "long and cumbersome for both sides," often taking 10 years to arrive at a decision. There should be a more streamlined way under the Aggregate Resources Act (ARA) to deal with the applications, he said.

"Where we're headed now is conflict, conflict, conflict," he said. Eventually this will lead to proposals being denied "and then, we'll have a shortage of aggregate," he warned.

Miller was invited to speak to council about recommendations in his annual report released late last year. Noting that the Greater Golden Horseshoe Area is projected to grow by four million people over the next 25 years, he suggested that provincial plans to accommodate growth have their priorities mixed. Instead of deciding where millions of people will live and what highways will be needed for the new growth, planners should first turn their attention to where the aggregate for the roads will come from, he said.

Miller said the province, which consumes about 175 million tonnes of aggregate every year, isn't in danger of running short of rock but it might have to be extracted outside the area, farther away from large urban centres. "Realistically, there is a restricted amount of aggregate in the Golden Horseshoe Area," he added.

In his annual report, Miller used the Flamborough quarry application as an example of the conflict between provincial policies on aggregate extraction and environmental protection. The proposed St. Marys site is inside the greenbelt's natural heritage system and contains provincially significant wetlands and woodlands. But Miller, in his address to council, said such systems are "subservient to aggregate extraction."

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