

City seeks to protect water

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Hamilton city council has joined Carlisle area residents in asking the Ontario government for assurances that groundwater will be protected from potential adverse impacts associated with the proposed St. Marys Flamborough quarry.

Last week, council gave unanimous support to a motion presented by Ward 15 councillor Margaret McCarthy asking the province to "fully consider the potential ramifications of the proposed development and "require a formal review by the Halton/Hamilton Source Protection Committee, as part of the local source protection process."

Council's action was applauded by Graham Flint, chair of FORCE (Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment), a grassroots citizen's group opposed to the quarry. Noting that neighbouring residents have been concerned about the quarry's possible effects on their groundwater since the proposal surfaced four years ago, Flint welcomed the support of the local municipality in safeguarding the groundwater-based municipal drinking water system that serves Carlisle's 3,000 residents. Residents also fear that adverse impacts could be experienced by the community managed well at Stonebrook Estates, as well as by several hundred nearby residential wells.

"Now, two layers of stakeholders are speaking out on the issue," he said. "The City of Hamilton is speaking out for the first time on the significant issue of drinking water. This sends an important signal to the province at a key decision point."

Council's decision comes on the heels of a postcard campaign initiated by FORCE as part of an advocacy campaign urging Premier Dalton McGuinty to adopt a 2008 New Year's resolution to protect drinking water and quash the quarry application. To date, more than 1,000 print cards and about 600 e-cards, sent through FORCE's website, have been forwarded to McGuinty.

As for council's support coming at a "key" time, Flint was referring to the Ontario Ministry of the Environment's (MOE's) current review of the St. Marys application for a temporary permit to take water (PTTW) to allow the company to test a groundwater recirculation pumping system for the proposed quarry. The application, submitted in October 2006, roused concerns by nearby residents about the test's possible effects on area groundwater resources.

Last fall a rare public health notification was issued by Hamilton's Public Health Services, warning the MOE about potential groundwater shortages or contamination in the area near the quarry unless certain conditions are required of those doing the test. The quarry site is on 11th Concession Road East near Milborough Line.

Hamilton council also gave unanimous consent to another motion by Councillor McCarthy asking the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) to reinstate security deposits for quarry rehabilitation. Flint said there is a backlog of Ontario quarry sites that haven't been rehabilitated and although the Aggregate Resources Act requires that all licensed quarries have a rehabilitation plan, monitoring their compliance hasn't proven to be effective.

"Our research shows that many pits can go many years without inspection," he said.

Two weeks ago, the president of the Ontario Stone, Sand and Gravel Association (OSSGA) told the Review that the security deposit funds were replaced about 10 years ago by a provincial fund that is available to rehabilitate sites that fail to meet rehabilitation requirements. Carol Hochu also said the Aurora district office of the MNR has charts showing that the amount of area being rehabilitated had more than doubled in recent years. She also argued that it's incorrect to suggest that without the security fund, there is no incentive to rehabilitate.