

ELMIRA INDEPENDENT

Group organizes against gravel-pit proposal. BridgeKeepers has website, Facebook presence

Published - Dec 16th, 2008

By Gail Martin Independent Editor

Opposition to a proposed gravel pit is heating up in Woolwich Township. BridgeKeepers, a local group that has formed in opposition to Capital Paving's proposal to build a gravel pit near the West Montrose covered bridge, not only has a presence on Facebook, but has produced a four-page glossy document, outlining their concerns about the proposal.

"We're getting organized," said BridgeKeepers spokesman Tony Dowling. "We have supporters not just from West Montrose, but literally from all around the world."

The Facebook page, which invites those concerned to join, went from zero to 2,300 members in a matter of three weeks.

While there are many concerns about the gravel pit proposal, the main one is location — Dowling notes that the pit will be only 180 metres away from the end of the West Montrose covered bridge.

The pit, proposed by Capital Paving, could extract up to 500,000 tonnes of gravel per year — more than half the 800,000 tonnes that was extracted in the entire township last year.

Dowling said he is doing his best to get accurate information on his group's website — www.bridgekeepers.ca — and has asked Capital Paving to check his facts.

In addition to the concerns over location, Dowling has concerns about the proposal to dig under the water table, in some areas, and the relative size and scope of the pit.

However, according to George Lourenco, with Capital Paving, the actual area of the gravel pit is actually fairly small in size, compared to the industry average. It is approximately 100 acres in size, and will only have a lifespan of seven to nine years, said Lourenco.

It is also located in a prime aggregate extraction zone, as indicated both by the Ministry of Natural Resources, and the Region of Waterloo and Woolwich Township, which have all identified this as an area where aggregate can be extracted.

Lourenco noted that Capital Paving has completed a number of studies to ensure that all concerns are taken into consideration.

As for digging under the water table, Lourenco notes that only 1.6 per cent of the overall extraction area will be below the water table — the remaining 98.4 per cent is above the water table.

Still, Dowling is not convinced.

Dowling thinks that Capital Paving might not be aware of what he calls the “Covered Bridge experience,” in which tourists not only stop at the bridge, but also tour the countryside on the way to the area’s most well known landmark.

They would travel along Letson Drive, which is now set to be in the middle of the gravel pit.

“They will hear the back-up beepers, conveyors and trucks, and everything else,” said Dowling.

He is also concerned about the increased truck traffic in the area, especially in light of the large number of conservative Mennonites who still use horse and buggies — and the area schoolchildren who walk to school.

Lourenco notes, however, that Capital Paving has already been in consultation with the Mennonite community, and is listening to their concerns. Traffic studies have also been completed.

And, Lourenco added, Capital Paving has a very good safety record, and is “award-winning” when it comes to safety and the environment.

Capital Paving has its own website — at <http://capitalpaving-montrosepitfacts.net>, as a means of making sure the public gets all the information they need about the pit.

Lourenco is hopeful that as the application process continues, these concerns will be alleviated.

If not, Lourenco added, “we tend to find that once we are operating the actual site, people’s perceptions change, and they find it is not as bad as they thought it would be.”

As for Dowling, he still is convinced the gravel pit is not a good fit — and he hopes to persuade Woolwich council to rule against the application.

However, if he fails in that quest, Dowling and his group hope to accomplish at least one thing — “should it go ahead, we want to minimize the impact. We know we can’t have zero impact.”

The gravel pit proposal is currently in a comment period at the Ministry of Natural Resources, and is expected to come to council for a zone change sometime in the new year.