

Green Party speaks out on Tottenham Pit expansion

By Bill Rea

Local residents are still fighting plans of Brock Aggregates to expand a large aggregate pit in northeast Caledon, and that has become an election issue.

Residents and supporters of the Green Party, including Dufferin-Caledon candidate Nancy Urekar and provincial party leader Mike Schreiner gathered at the site in northeast Caledon (also known as the Tottenham Pit) to announce that the fight is not over.

Mr. Schreiner was there to pledge joint federal and provincial cooperation to strengthen protections for farmland and water.

Area resident Cheryl Connors, representing Protect Caledon Inc., said people living in the area of the pit learned of plans to expand the operation in 2011. She said they were never officially told anything, and learned the filing of the application took place around Christmas.

She told the people gathered that the property is in a natural linkage area of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, and extracting materials from under the water table in such a designation is not allowed.

Ms. Connors said approval of the pit expansion was given by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) in May.

"Not a single member of the community was notified," she said.

"We will go to court and use all the legal measures necessary to get it stopped," she added.

Ms. Connors said that over the last four years, she has learned how "terribly unfair" aggregate laws are in Ontario. "Communities have very little rights," she, adding the wording in the legislation governing the Moraine is clear. "They can't go below the water table."

As well, Ms. Connors said they have sought help from Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones, as well as the Minister, but such calls have been ignored.

Ms. Urekar also wondered where Ms. Jones has been.

"It's a problem all over the riding," she said.

She also commented on the importance to work across differing jurisdictions, repeating the Green Party plan to create a Council of Canadian Governments, that would be represented at the federal, provincial, municipal and First Nations levels.

She also said Caledon is fairly responsive to the Green message, "but it takes votes."

"This is one of the ridings where it could happen," she added.

Mr. Schreiner said his party would work with federal officials to protect farmland and water resources. He also commented that during last year's provincial election campaign, the Liberals said they would review the Aggregate Resources Act. Mr. Schreiner said people are still waiting.

He also said the party is calling on the federal government to review changes that have been made to the Environmental Assessment Act, commenting the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper has "gutted" it.

Mr. Schreiner said it's wrong to expect citizens to use their own money (digging into RRSPs and other savings), time and resources to get the government to follow its own laws.

‘We desperately need political leadership to protect food lands and water,’ Mr. Schreiner declared. ‘The provincial Liberal government has failed to strengthen the Aggregate Resources Act despite promises made in response to the Melancthon mega quarry during the 2011 provincial election, and the Harper government has gutted federal environmental legislation. Greens will continue to stand up for food and water.’

‘As your MP, I will fight to protect farmland, water supply and green space for our communities. We have to work together across jurisdictions to create the best public policy,’ Ms. Urekar added. ‘I will push for all three levels of government to cooperate in protecting our food and water.’

Ms. Connors said the Town of Caledon has been asked to get involved in this matter, and she said a report is slated to go before Town council this coming Tuesday (Oct. 20). She added Peel Region is going to be approached, in order that this whole effort not be carried on the backs of residents.

Caledon Mayor Allan Thompson said Town council has never been officially informed of the MNRF approval, adding a notice was sent to staff in June.

‘Staff has been waiting for that hard copy since,’ he added.

Mr. Thompson said there is a concern with the local wells, but also pointed out the Town is limited in what it can do on this, since it's a Provincial matter.

‘We're allowed to comment on it, but that's the extent of what we have,’ he said.

He also confirmed a report will be going to council next week, but it will just be for information.

Attempts to contact representatives for Brock Aggregates for comment were unsuccessful.