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Capital Paving withdraws pit application

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Independent Editor

It's time for a celebration in the village of West Montrose.

That's because Capital Paving has officially withdrawn its application for a below water-table gravel pit adjacent to the village.

In a press release issued on Friday, Aug. 9,

George Lourenco, resources manager with Capital Paving, said "while the company truly believes that it could have operated the gravel pit responsibly and with respect for surrounding neighbours, Capital decided to acknowledge the concerns of the local community of West Montrose and the covered bridge."

The decision came after Woolwich Township officially closed the file on the Capital Paving application, since there had been two years of inactivity on the part of the applicant. Capital Paving could have opted to simply walk away, without formally withdrawing its application, or appeal the decision to the Ontario Municipal Board.

The move is five years after BridgeKeepers (also known as the West Montrose Residents' Association) first became aware of the application, and began their battle to prevent the gravel pit from opening.

Tony Dowling, a spokesman for BridgeKeepers, said it is very difficult to quantify the time and energy that has gone into fighting the proposal.

The core group opposing the application met nearly every week during the past five years, delving into the science behind the application and coming up with strategies. Other work including fundraising for what was a monumentally expensive endeavour, as well as meeting with local politicians, planners and members of the media, in hopes of getting the message out that the gravel pit was not a good fit for the community.

They also kept an active eye on the workings of Woolwich council.

"We've have someone at almost all the township council meetings in the past four years," said Dowling, "keeping track of how council and staff are regarding our efforts."

Dowling personally also became involved in Gravel Watch Ontario, serving as vice-president, and the group was also active in the provincial review of the Aggregate Resources Act. A report on that review is still pending, and may come out this fall.

West Montrose was also the backdrop for political speeches during the opposition to the pit, with former Kitchener-Conestoga MPP Leeanna Pendergast advocating for the need for new rules to govern gravel pit applications, during the provincial election in 2011.

Dowling said that the township's pursuit of the Cultural Heritage Landscape for West Montrose, and the requirement that any development not have a negative impact on the CHL, was an instrumental step in Capital Paving withdrawing its application — even though the CHL designation was something that initially considered by the township in 2005, three years prior to the Capital Paving application.

Dowling suspects that the last two years of inactivity on the file was in relation to the difficulty in meeting this criterion.

"I think it was huge," said Dowling. "Capital initially reported that there was no cultural heritage impact, because they were far enough away from the bridge."

"Capital Paving might have had difficulty in supporting the claim there was no impact."

Dowling also would like to give credit to the township for its diligence in how it reviewed the application, "requiring additional reports and peer reviews needed to properly evaluate the appropriateness of a zoning change. They are to be congratulated for their professionalism and diligence in pursuing the right results."

A community barbecue planned for Sept. 21 by the BridgeKeepers will now be much more celebratory in nature than originally planned, said Dowling, and he said the group welcomes anyone from the community that would like to come.

"The public is welcome to stop by," said Dowling.

In the meantime, the BridgeKeepers group may have some informal celebrations of their own.

"We were pretty happy with this decision," said Dowling.

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