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Gravel pit applicant presses Woolwich to move forward

May 15, 2009 By: [Steve Kannon](#)

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Impatient with the handling of its application for a gravel pit in West Montrose, Capital Paving wants Woolwich to speed up the process. The township, however, is intent on a full study of the matter, requesting still more information from the company.

Studies of the impacts on both groundwater and air quality are required before the township can move ahead, director of engineering and planning Dan Kennaley told councillors this week in discussing a letter from Capital Paving.

In that letter, the Guelph-based company complained the process has already gone on for more than eight months, calling on the township to hold a mandatory public meeting shortly and to begin having studies submitted by the firm reviewed by other experts.

Some of the reports are ready for peer review, Kennaley noted, but the environmental impact studies will have to wait until the remaining reports – a subwatershed scale hydrogeological study and a dust and air quality impact study – have been provided by the company.

For its part, Capital claims neither study is required, as the relevant information has been covered in the reports submitted to date.

The hydrogeological study tackles one of the most contentious issues, as the company plans to excavate below the water table on portions of the 115-acre site. That gives rise to worries about the impact on local wells, the nearby Grand River and the future prospects of farming the land after any aggregate operation has closed and the land remediated.

"They want to dig far too close to the water table, which has repercussions for the site's future use as farmland, and can have an impact on local wells," Tony Dowling, part of the Bridge Keepers organization opposed to the gravel pit, said in an interview.

He sees this as a precedent-setting application because of the request to excavate below the water table.

The group is also worried about the impact the proposed pit would have on the area surrounding the covered bridge, the one-of-a-kind landmark that is an important tourist attraction. And while other gravel pits operate in the area, by virtue of its size, there would be three to five times as much dust and noise, with a

commensurate amount of truck traffic, he said.

The Bridge Keepers have spent the last eight months gathering information, fundraising and developing a strategy for the upcoming battle. The effort has spread beyond West Montrose, as financial contributions have started to come in from others outside the area. As well, volunteers approaching visitors at the bridge have seen them digging in their pockets to support maintaining the area's cultural heritage, itself part of a study recently submitted to the township by University of Waterloo professor Robert Shipley.

"When we tell them what's happening, they're happy to offer the change in their pockets or \$5 or \$20. These are visitors from all over – Germany ... we had a busload from Britain the other day."

Although open to negotiating with Capital Paving, the residents are not optimistic about a settlement, said Dowling. Instead they're digging in for a long fight.

Coun. Mark Bauman, however, suggested a decision should be made sooner rather than later.

"One of the things we don't want to do is to appear that we're dragging our feet just to drag out the process – that just costs everyone money," he said, noting five pending applications mean gravel pits will be the big issue for council over the next several months, if not years.

"At the end of the day, I'd like to see this come to a conclusion – whatever that conclusion is – as quickly and as timely as possible, for all of the gravel pit applications, so that residents can get on with their lives and get accustomed to the new normal [when] whatever changes come along."

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