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## Gravel pit conundrum here to stay

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

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As Coun. Mark Bauman noted at this week's Woolwich council meeting, gravel pits are about to become a big part of the agenda for many months – and perhaps years – to come.

There are currently five aggregate applications under consideration at the township. The most contentious are the Capital Paving bid for an operation in West Montrose and the Hunsberger application in Conestogo.

The former raises the hackles of those concerned about the covered bridge and its surrounding environment, above and beyond the noise, dust and safety concerns that naturally come along with such operations. In the Conestogo case, the gravel pit threatens to send soaring the number of trucks rumbling through the village, as well as negatively impacting the quality of life of nearby residents.

In the normal course of affairs, the cost-benefit analysis would provide councillors with an easy answer: deny the applications. Municipal share of aggregate profits are miniscule, not enough to cover the direct costs associated with road repairs and safety measures, let alone the health and well-being of residents.

Like those who settle in the country then begin complaining about the smell of the surrounding farmland, anyone who moves close to an existing gravel pit must live by the credo of caveat emptor. The situation is much different when someone attempts to establish a pit near an existing neighbourhood, as is the case in both examples.

Unfortunately, the situation isn't as simple as that. No, councillors will have to weigh the likelihood of their denial being immediately appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board, which has a track record of ignoring local decisions in favour of developers.

The poor provincial record of respecting local wishes is magnified in the case of gravel pits, where the Aggregate Resources Act is practically a cudgel, and the Ministry of Natural Resources seen as a defender of operators, not Ontarians.

Of course, we do need gravel, and it does have to come from somewhere. Because of its geography, this stretch of the province is rife with aggregate, as witnessed by the numerous pits already in operation. If every application for an extraction licence was turned down, we'd have to find alternative sources for an essential material.

Clearly, then, we need to find a balance point.

Currently, provincial policies favour developers, putting far too much power in the hands of the OMB. Opponents such as Gravel Watch Ontario say the same is true of the aggregate policies. They also lament the actions of the MNR in enforcing what feeble rules do exist. Fixing those inadequacies would go a long way in reducing the disputes over gravel pit applications.

High on the priority list is the enacting of sunset clauses on gravel licences: hard and intractable timelines for the decommissioning of pits. As it stands today, operators can continue to work an “active” site for years, a favourite tactic for avoiding the remediation now required of pit owners. Such a move would assure nearby residents that the health and safety risks would exist for a fixed time only, an important step.

As it stands right now, even where municipalities have tried to impose sunset clauses, the MNR has simply stepped in and voided them.

Equally pressing are rules to assure quick and full rehabilitation of pits, returning them to the identical state seen before excavation began. Here, too, the record has been abysmal. Changes haven’t been forthcoming.

No, the issue before council isn’t going away any time soon.

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## 2 Comments on "Gravel pit conundrum here to stay"

### 1. [Frank Price](#) on Tue, 2nd Jun 2009

I think that both the OMB and MNR are simply not taking into consideration the “Quality of Life” issues that really impact us all and which must be measured carefully in each circumstance. Surely putting in a Gravel Pit in a quiet town like Conestogo or Winterbourne which will potentially run 12 hours a day and produce a minimum of 17,000 trucks per year has a dramatic impact on the quality of life. To think it doesn’t suggests that somebody has their collective heads in the sand, or should I say pit.

Noise, safety, environment, are real issues and they really do affect the quality of life of all the residence.

We chose to live our lives here because we all embraced those key elements which stand out in small rural communities; safety for our children, low traffic volumes, a natural rural non urban environment, low noise rates and the enjoyment of nature, wildlife and the small rural life style. Surely two businessmen who appear to have no regard for these [our values], can’t change this for everyone.

In the end the MNR and OMB must change their political stand and give a larger weighting score to real life issues over those of business when doing their assessments.

Certainly the quality of live in all of its forms, of all the towns' people out rates the almighty dollar and the business desires of one or two individuals; who as an aside don't live in the very communities being affected.

It's on days like this that I wish we were all aboriginals, because then we could simply block all the roads to and from our community. I'll bet if that were the case the MNR and OMB would be told to back off in a heart beat by the province.

Big Chief Pain in the Pit

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2. [Rick Hendershot](#) on Fri, 26th Jun 2009

Having a continuous string of large, noisy gravel trucks roaring through Conestogo is not a future concern. It is happening right now. I recently saw 20 trucks in a 15 minute period pass through the main intersection of Conestogo.

What makes things worse is that virtually every one of them is speeding. From what I can tell truckers completely ignore the speed limit. This makes everything much worse – the noise, the danger, the wear and tear on the roads.

Since the traffic light was installed at the intersection of regional roads 17 and 22, drivers have a licence to speed through town at whatever speed they want.

Regional authorities may be powerless to keep trucks off our village roads, but they are not powerless when it comes to enforcing the speed limits.

Why don't the police do their job and enforce the speed limit in Conestogo? If gravel truck traffic is inevitable, at least it could be made less intrusive, noisy and dangerous if it was slowed down.

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