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Pit applicant asks for speedier process

August 13, 2009 By: [Steve Kannon](#)

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Concerned about delays and extra costs, a developer seeking to open a gravel pit near Conestogo wants the township to drop its demand for more studies.

Woolwich is currently asking for outside reviews of seven of the eight reports concerning the Hunsberger pit submitted by Hunder Developments in support of its bid for a zone change to allow the aggregate operation. Questioning the need for peer reviews, planning consultant David Sisco called on township council this week to speed up the process.

“We are simply frustrated and somewhat at odds with staff’s requests,” he said in council chambers Tuesday night. “We’re not trying to circumvent the process ... we’re asking for some reasonableness,” Sisco added, saying Woolwich’s demand for peer reviews amounts to duplication as many of the reports are being scrutinized by other agencies, including the Region of Waterloo and the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Director of engineering and planning Dan Kennaley, however, dismissed that assertion, saying those reviews are more perfunctory, with the agencies relying on the credentials of the experts submitting the original reports. As well, those other bodies don’t share information in any detail with the municipality, providing no foundation for Woolwich to judge the gravel pit application.

“Peer reviews are a very important part of the planning process,” he said, calling Woolwich’s process one with “tough but fair rules.”

Tougher rules were exactly what councillors approved last year with the new aggregate policy, known as official plan amendment 13 (OPA 13). That policy is at the heart of an Ontario Municipal Board hearing initiated by another gravel pit applicant, Capital Paving, which is looking to open a large operation near West Montrose. That company, too, has complained about the pace of its application and the peer-review requirements.

While sympathizing with the applicant’s concerns about the pace, Coun. Mark Bauman said it’s important to follow the process established by the township.

In response to a question from Bauman, Kennaley said the peer review process isn’t automatic, but considered on a case-by-case basis.

Hunder Developments has been asked for seven peer reviews, as has Capital Paving. The two are the most contentious of five gravel pit applications now being studied by the township. Another, Kuntz Topsoil, Sand

and Gravel's proposal for a pit at Jigs Hollow Road, north of Conestogo, has been asked for two reviews. The remaining two, expansions of existing operations, will not require any peer reviews.

With the Hunsberger application, the township has already sent three of the reports – air quality, traffic and visual impact – out for peer review. After this week's request from the developer, the other four are now on hold, Kennaley explained.

Sisco noted that his client had not been informed that three reviews had already been requested, and had not agreed to the expenditure, which he estimated at \$30,000 for all seven reports demanded by the township.

In a related matter, councillors discussed a request from the Bridge Keepers, an organization opposed to the Capital Paving gravel pit, to provide the public with all information related to the application.

Chief administrative officer David Brenneman said current policy is to make all documents related to the zone change application available to the public. However, because of the OMB appeal, some of the files related to legal issues will remain confidential.

He also reiterated township policy that staff would not meet individually with any of the parties to discuss the zone change application, saying "it's not appropriate" to talk about the issue outside of an open and public meeting. The idea is to ensure that no one is seen to be given preferred status.

"There shouldn't be individual, one-on-one meetings with anyone."

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