

Melancthon council clarifies stand on quarry

By WES KELLER
Freelance Reporter

Prior to a public meeting Monday involving all affected provincial ministry officials and the township planner,

Melancthon Council outlined its official stance on a proposed 2,400-acre quarry.

The public resolution outlining the stance had been drafted earlier in the day behind closed doors.

It followed within weeks Mayor Debbie Fawcett's advising an open council meeting that she does not favour the quarry.

The conclusion of the resolution reads: "Council

is soliciting constructive information and advice from all proponents and opponents of the initiative, both as to process and factual matters.

"Council is considering the best ways of structur-

ing the process; for instance, whether to work towards a joint agency review approach, or to preserve total independence in regard to peer reviews.

"In any event, Council will work co-operatively with all parties to enable an expeditious, fair and thorough review of all the aspects of the initiative. Council is considering also the best way of adapting the processes to ensure input by the public.

"Council will be diligent in making sure that all reasonable peer reviews of the initiative are brought forward before decisions are made.

"Council is making sure that all costs of the initiative, considered reasonable, are borne by the proponent, and not by the general public. Council will not engage in exercises the sole purpose of which would appear to be to defeat the initiative. All of Council's actions will be in the broader context of considering what is best for our community overall," the resolution reads.

The Highland Companies is proposing a 2,400-acre limestone quarry in the township, which represents about one-third of the approximately 7,500 acres it has

purchase there. The company says the quarry would be in 300-acre segments, phased on 50 acres of each segment and rehabilitated to farmland continuously.

Highland, a private corporation, has not revealed specifically who its shareholders are except that it is a Boston-area group.

That group, or at least Highland, is headed by John Lowndes, whose family proposed a quarry in Flamborough Township that ultimately was flipped to St. Marys Cement, a Canadian company now owned by a Brazilian corporation.

An application for necessary zoning of the already designated aggregate extractive lands has yet to be submitted. But opponents, largely members of North Dufferin Agriculture and Community Taskforce (NDACT) have made allegations of inaction by Highland, along with accusations of inaction by the council.

The essence of Monday's public meeting was generally confirmation that the Province would have over-riding authority on any decisions made by the council. Andrew Doersam of Municipal Affairs and

Housing said decisions under the Planning Act must also be "consistent with the policies of the Provincial Policy Statement" (PPS).

Township Planner Jerry Jorden told the crowd of about 200 Melancthon and Mulmur residents that the council must make a decision on a quarry application within a legislated time frame. Even then, the decision must be consistent with federal and provincial legislation and guidelines, such as the PPS and Aggregate Resources Act.

"The key thing to bear in mind in both of these processes [Planning Act and ARA] is that the Township does not have the final approval authority. Overriding both of these, of course, is the provincial policy framework, primarily the Provincial Policy Statement. Our planning documents and planning decisions have to be consistent with the applicable provincial policies," he said.

On the burning issue of water, Barbara Slattery of the Ministry of Environment said every human activity has an impact of ground and/or surface water.

She said the mandate of MOE is the ensure that

such impacts are within acceptable limits.

Carole Neumann of OMAFRA said the PPS allows aggregate extraction, above and below the water table, on prime agricultural land, classes 1-3, including areas with special crops designations.

But, she said, the extraction would be subject to rehabilitation to agricultural land, if feasible.

In cases of pits and quarries, she added that there must be a demonstrated need.

In response to questions from the crowd, Mr. Jorden confirmed that the Township has compiled a list of requirements for a completed application. Once the quarry application has been filed, even if complete, the Township can ask the proponent for more studies or information.

Responding to Marni Walsh, he said the Township would not be doing studies "from the ground up," but would employ the best available peer reviewers of the proponent's studies at the proponent's expense.

Mayor Fawcett said aggregate resource information will soon be posted on Melancthon's website, www.melancthontownship.ca.

Committee firm on raise proposals

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they worked 30 to 100 hours per month, with the majority in the range of 70 to 90.

Mr. Green said he intends to "challenge the legality of the ad hoc committee," because it was appointed by council. "Appointing those who determine how much money they receive is neither open nor transparent."

(The Ontario Municipal Act requires a bylaw be passed to form any committee, and only a municipal council has authority to pass a bylaw.

When the council sought applications to serve on the committee there were only eight applicants for nine positions.) The committee wasn't the only supportive voice for the recommended increases. Ken Manwell, who served on the previous council from 2003 to 2006, said the raise was reasonable.

"It was an honour to be a council member," said Mr. Manwell, "but when I was on council, I spent 35 to 40 hours a week minimum. I would definitely support the increase, as would anybody who (has sat on council) before."

Mr. Manwell suggested consideration be made to increase number of councillors from five to seven to lessen the workload. "When I sat on council, I sat on six or seven committees and that was draining."

(The council had nine members until 1997, when the town had a population of about 21,600. And 50 years ago, when former mayor Victor Large was reeve and the town's population was about 4,600, the council had a mayor, reeve, deputy reeve and six councillors.)

Mr. Green, nevertheless, said it should be an honour and privilege to serve on council and, if a member finds it financially infeasible, he or she "should step down and say 'I can't afford to serve on council.'"

Mr. Long countered:

"We don't want it to have to be that way."

"It appears council has been underpaid for a significant amount of time," said committee member Brian Wormington, adding that councils in the past have done "the popular thing" by not addressing pay raises and it has caught up with the present one.

The draft report also listed the budgets of other municipalities and raised a few puzzled eyebrows among those in attendance who read them.

For example, the report stated that the city of Stratford, with a population of 31,000, has an annual budget of \$113 million. New Tecumseh, on the other hand, had a population of 28,800 and a budget of just \$28 million.

Town resident Chris Thompson pointed out the disparity at Monday's meeting and suggested the committee clarify these budget amounts before it submits its final report to council.

In the case of Stratford, the budget figures reported were actually a combination of operating and capital budgets.

By comparison, Orangeville's reported budget of \$20 million is based on the tax levy. The town's operating budget is

approximately \$28 million and the extra funding is from sources other than property taxes, such as grants and development charges.

Stratford's tax levy is \$33.7 million, its operating budget about \$40 million, and includes social spending which, in Orangeville's case, is handled at the county level.

The city's 2009 budget shows the cost of mayor and council at \$309,775, compared to \$211,000 for Orangeville.

Mr. Green and another

pay-raise opponent, Don Kidd, used Monday's remuneration meeting as a forum to express their displeasure with the current council. Mr. Kidd said "most people today aren't getting raises, and I don't think this council has done that good a job."

Mr. Green said the present council "should get a 30 per cent decrease."

At that point, Mr. Manwell rose and said: "Separate personalities from the role. If you don't like the council, there's an election coming up."

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