

MOE officials warn Halton to be water wary

By **STUART JOHNSTON**
Staff writer

Halton Region must exercise extreme caution in its quest to find enough groundwater to accommodate Georgetown's planned expansion to 40,000 people, ministry of environment (MOE) officials warn. In an interview, Wes Lammers of the MOE admitted his office has

many concerns about regional officials sinking wells in the Georgetown area, which is part of the reason why current well monitoring programs are moving at a snail's pace.

In particular, Lammers referred to Test Well 15, located on the east side of Main St., south of 15 Sideroad. Halton officials had been

hoping to pump one million gallons daily from the well, but due to its close proximity to Silver Creek, which feeds the Credit River, extensive (and expensive) pre-pumping tests had to be conducted first.

Although this "background monitoring" was completed earlier this year, the MOE refused to allow the project to go any further until it is

satisfied that no harm will come to the creek, its inhabitants and surrounding groundwater once the well is put into full production.

Part of the testing includes measuring the quality and quantity of Silver Creek upstream of Test Well 15, and then again downstream to see if any changes have occurred from the pumping. However, Lammers explained there are discrepancies with the data collected, and is insisting the region use more accurate measurements.

But, Halton's manager of special studies Benson Leung admitted he doesn't quite understand what concerns the MOE has with the data, noting his staff will be meeting with ministry officials to clear the air.

"Some of the agencies are having a hard time being specific on these things," he said. "We may have to install more accurate devices for the well, or something. But, I can't recommend to the councillors to spend more taxpayers' money until I know for sure exactly what the ministry is looking for."

But, Lammers said the possibility exists that the well may not be deemed acceptable by the MOE after all, which will force the region to continue its search for other sources of water.

Stressing that speculating on the future may be premature at this point, Lammers nevertheless explained that the test well may prove to have far reaching effects for Georgetown.

Part of the problem, according to Lammers, is that the well lies upstream from Georgetown's wastewater treatment plant, a state-of-the-art facility that is capable of handling the planned population of 40,000 people.

The wastewater plant relies on a certain amount of water flowing in Silver Creek for the facility to function properly, he noted. The treated wastewater pumped out, called effluent, needs the creek to be at a specific volume, or else it may poison the stream. The stream's ability to assimilate the effluent is critical, Lammers noted, so any changes to its quantity, quality and temperature will not only affect the creek's wildlife, but also the

wastewater treatment plant.

For instance, if the creek level drops due to pumping from the test well, the treatment plant may have to be downsized to handle less than 40,000 people — thereby limiting Georgetown's future growth. On the other hand, Halton may decide to spend more money and upgrade the quality of the effluent again. It underwent a major overhaul about two years ago.

"In the end, one of the scenarios could be a trade-off — maybe Georgetown will be able to take more water from the well, but it won't be able to grow as much," Lammers said. "If there's no water, what can you do? We need the headwaters of the Credit (River) to stay intact, that's why we must be very careful where we find our (water) sources...No matter what we do when we sink a well, we are removing water from the aquifer to another area. That, in turn, may affect other aquifers, because it's all part of the same pie...All we are trying to do with the monitoring is to make sure we don't go back to the region later on and say, 'sorry, you can't use this much water.'"

Recently, the MOE granted a certificate of approval for Test Well 22, located at Lindsay Court and Trafalgar Rd., but only for approximately one-third of the well's expected capacity — 2,100 people. Halton must do extensive monitoring for this well also until June 1995. After that time, the ministry may allow more water to be taken from the well, depending on the test results. To ensure Halton hasn't over-extended itself, the well will be pumped at its full capacity, but other wells in Georgetown will be downsized or turned off. That way, if a problem develops, it can be pinpointed at the test well.

However, local councillors recently approved, in principle, Paramount Development's subdivision proposal in Georgetown south, for about 1,400 people, which leaves enough water for only 600 people.

Local officials are confident, however, that the developer will phase in its subdivision at the same pace as new water sources are found by the region.

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