

Nelson Quarry expansion runs into opposition at open house

BY BERNADETTE WARD

Property damage, noise, pollution and water were top of mind issues for a tense crowd in attendance at the second public information meeting surrounding the proposed 82 hectare expansion of the Nelson Quarry near Mount Nemo on September 21.

"Water is the biggest issue that people are concerned about. Without it, where will we go?" asked Natalie Lebrecht of Protect Escarpment Rural Land (PERL).

The meeting, hosted by the Region of Halton with spokespeople from Nelson Quarry as well as local politicians and Ministry of Natural Resources staff, was intended to provide an update on the status of the application and the progress of the Joint Agency Review Team.

The crowd of over 100 people sat through the Region's presentation that outlined reports and information on issues such as noise, air, the natural environment, hydrogeology and water resources.

Nelson spokesperson Brian Zeeman, who attempted to woo the crowd with employment and revenue statistics, fared less well.

Residents for the most part were unimpressed with the fact that the quarry employs 48 people, 18 of which have over 20 years with the company.

A number of employees attended the information session and were quick to point out that requests to use other quarries for Burlington's needs would result in higher costs and loss of jobs.

"There are probably 40 people in the immediate area of the quarry that rely on the quarry for work themselves or are related to someone who works there," Greg Simon said.

Similarly, the lure of approximately \$75,000 from licensing that goes to the region and city of Burlington fell on deaf ears, as did his attempt to soothe the crowd with promises of restoration. "Nelson has experience in creating these types of landforms," he said adding that Kelso was also once a quarry and is now a public asset.

Not particularly well received, his comments were rebutted by Burlington Councillor John Taylor who pointed out that although the quarry did provide restoration, the taxpayers also made a contribution.

He also pointed to operational issues and the cumulative effect of and damage by blasting and his comments resonated with a cross crowd.

"The whole area is being affected. They have to change the blasting," said Victor Saric, a resident who lives close to the current quarry.

Many resident's expressed concerns about the blasting, citing broken windows and damaged foundations. Most were unwilling to speak on the record for fear of affecting their ability to sell their property.

Steve Drew, Nelson's quarry manager pointed out that science dictates the size and intensity of the blasts. Structural damage, he says, does not occur below 50 mm per second. According to Drew, Nelson is blasting at the permitted 12.5 mm per second.

Asked if the resident's concerns were unwarranted, Drew admitted that there might be some cause for concern, but that not everything could be laid at the feet of the mining operation.

"I'm saying that not all of the damage to their property is from the quarry," he said. "People here have some valid concerns and we will deal with them correctly. That's the way Nelson operates."

It may be the way Nelson operates, but the residents in attendance were not interested and singer Sarah Harmer, one of a number of speakers and a member of PERL, summed up the feelings of many in the room.

"Economics are not the bottom line in a biosphere, the environment is the bottom line," she said to applause.

There are still many reports and steps left in the application process and for more information try the region's website at www.region.halton.on.ca or Nelson's site at www.nelsonaggregate.com. To make a written comment to the region, e-mail Helma Geerts at geertsh@region.halton.on.ca.



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