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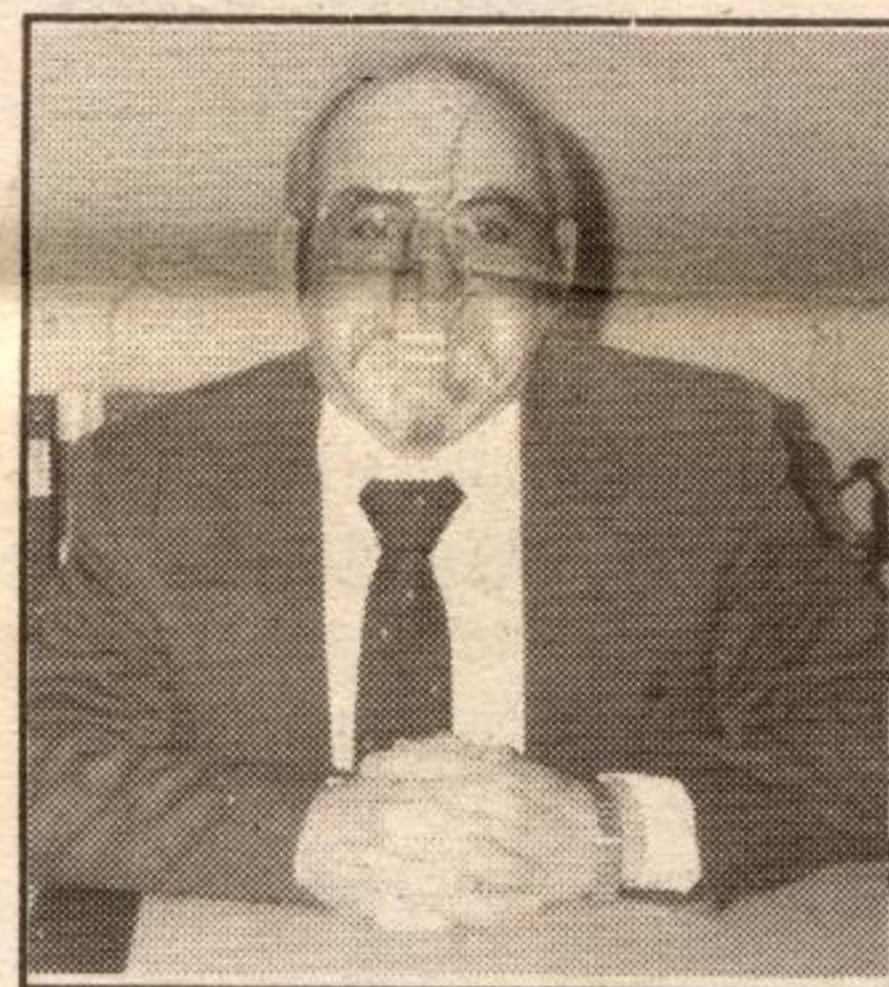
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EAGLE vows quarry fight will continue

By Dianne Cornish

Despite a provincial government decision against them, members of EAGLE have vowed to continue their fight against expansion plans for the Acton Quarry.

After waiting more than two years to learn that the Ontario government won't grant its request for an Environmental Assessment Act (EAA) review of United Aggregates' plans to expand the Acton Quarry, the chairman of a Halton Hills-based citizen's group vowed last week to continue to fight the proposal.

Reacting to last week's announcement by Environment Minister Ruth Grier that the aggregate company's expansion plans "cannot legally be designated under the EAA," EAGLE chairman Pat Woode said the local environmental group "plans to pursue this further."

EAGLE (Ecology Awareness Group, Landscape and Environment) complained two years ago to the Ombudsman that the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) and the Ministry of Environment (MOE) were not ensuring that the quarry comply with government regulations.

"They have allowed water diversion from one watershed to another," Woode charged, adding that the quarry, in EAGLE's eyes, is operating in contravention of the Lakes and Rivers Improvement Act, Conservation Authority Act and the Ontario Water Resources Act.

Woode said the local group will continue to urge the Ombudsman to look into "these violations." She also stated that EAGLE will continue to press for an amendment to the Niagara Escarpment Plan (NEP) initiated by the group three years ago. The amendment would include more of the quarry's acreage within the Niagara Escarpment Area (NEA) where tighter controls on land use are enforced.

United Aggregates owns a 575-acre quarry, just south of Acton on the east side of Highway 25. The company is currently working a section of the quarry on the north side of Regional Road 43, but plans to expand operations to the 315 acres on the south side of the road.

Woode said Thursday that she expects EAGLE, the Town of Halton Hills and Halton Region to have some input into the site plan process which will eventually validate United Aggregates' site licence. It will then fall upon the MNR to decide whether the quarry is allowed to expand, she said.

"EAGLE continues to be concerned about the whole quarrying issue, particularly in relation to the Niagara Escarpment area which contains wetlands and water recharge areas," Woode said.

Commenting on the background

of the issue, the EAGLE chairman said the local environmental group contends that United Aggregates' 1972 licence, which replaced its original 1970 licence, wasn't obtained according to government regulations.

"This quarry did not comply with the regulations set up at that particular time," she said. As a result, EAGLE will continue to argue that expanded quarrying on the site should face a public hearing.

According to Woode, the government made a mistake in 1972 by accepting a site plan that was radically different from that contained in the quarry operator's 1970 licence. The original licence called for quarrying on 150 acres of the site and included "10 to 12 documents," Woode said.

When licences were re-issued by the MNR in 1972, the site plan called for expansion of the quarrying operation to 575 acres and included about 18 alternative uses for the site, including garbage disposal, she said.

EAGLE contends that the quarry should not be allowed to expand to four times its size without a public hearing.

Asked to comment about the recent announcement's impact on the possible location of a private landfill site in a portion of the Acton Quarry, Woode predicted: "If they get approval for the landfill on the north side of the quarry, we'll (eventually) be faced with garbage on the south side." A decision on whether a mined-out portion of the quarry can be used as a dumpsite is expected from a Consolidated Hearings Board by early September.

In last week's media release containing Grier's announcement, it was noted that "a number of concerns with the operation of the quarry" have been forwarded by Grier to Natural Resources Minister Bud Wildman. The MNR has the authority, under the Aggregate Resources Act, to amend conditions of the quarry's licence.

While Grier is quoted in the press release as having said, "I am confident that Mr. Wildman will ensure that the environment near Acton quarry is protected," Woode expressed personal doubts about the comment. "Based on EAGLE's past dealings (with the Ministry), there's not much hope that MNR will do an effective job of protecting the environment," she stated.

Woode also said she is "disappointed" by the recent announcement because it shows that the government doesn't want to rectify a mistake in the licencing process dating back more than 20 years.

"Two wrongs don't make a right," she said.

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