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Rehab plans at quarries queried

By Frances Niblock

Dufferin Aggregate's property and resource manager Andrea Bourrie faced open skepticism from several politicians about its plans at the Acton quarry when she appeared before Town Council on Monday.

After providing a status report on potential expansion plans, and asking the Town to help select members for a quarry after-use advisory committee, Bourrie was challenged by Mayor Rick Bonnette to give him a "comfort level" that long-promised rehabilitation would occur.

"Something makes me skeptical. What makes your company different from other companies?" Bonnette said, noting there have been many different rehabilitation scenarios over the years before Dufferin purchased the Acton operation, located on the north and south sides of 22 Side Road, between Highway 25 and the Fourth Line.

"Obviously, there's a lot of skepticism, and the aggregate industry doesn't always have the best reputation, but what sets Dufferin apart from others in the industry, I think that for starters, we do what we say we will do," Bourrie said, pointing to rehabilitation work at its Milton quarry as proof, and noting that as a publicly-traded company, Dufferin is required to set aside after-use

funds.

Some councillors were surprised by the possible expansion news – especially since Halton staff had been talking with Dufferin since the summer and a joint agency review team had been formed – and Bourrie made a commitment to Bonnette that Dufferin would not file an application to expand until after the business decision was made and that the application would be comprehensive and technically sound.

Regional Ward 1/2 Councillor Clark Somerville thanked Dufferin for responding to issues, but added, "I am one who is skeptical," after hearing the previous owner promise public consultation on rehabilitation plans.

He asked if equipment stored in the oldest mined-out area could be moved, so results of rehabilitation could begin because it could be a "hell of a long time" before the public will see long-promised results.

Bourrie said they want to accelerate the rehabilitation and might move equipment and a processing plant, and are also looking at a parcel of land between the rail line and Glen Lawson Road, where a trail loop could be developed in three to five years.

Bourrie noted that Dufferin's progressive rehabilitation plan involved 30-hectares last year and they planted

20,000 trees.

Bourrie said there could be a "spectacular after-use" at the Acton quarry, where the existing after-use site plan essentially calls for a dry bowl with simple side slopes and grassed areas.

"We believe there's an opportunity for a lot more than is required by the Ministry of Natural Resources site plan, irrespective what happens with a future expansion," Bourrie said, adding Dufferin is inviting 12 members of the Town – councillors, staff, interested stakeholders and the public – to sit on an after-use vision advisory committee that will begin work in May.

Halton planning and public works committee members were expected yesterday (Wednesday) to close a gap in the Region's aggregate review protocol to inform politicians when pre-consultation begins on quarry applications so they are not taken by surprise, as happened in Halton Hills with Dufferin's potential expansion.

That change is welcomed by Barbara Halsall, past-president of P.O.W.E.R. (Protect Our Water And Environmental Resources) who told Town Council on Monday that taxpayers need to know when staff are spending time on a project because "secrecy leads to mis-trust of Council."

MPAC official briefs Town on system

A local farmer accused by tax assessment officials of operating a winery after buying used wine boxes for his vegetables is this year's MPAC "horror story" in Halton Hills, according to Ward Two Councillor Bryan Lewis.

Lewis recounted the story to MPAC (Municipal Property Assessment Corporation) account manager Greg Baxter who appeared before Town Council recently to update changes at MPAC, the organization that supplies municipalities with the assessment data needed to calculate taxes. That information cost Halton \$5-million last year.

It was Baxter's first appearance at Council since last March's scathing report from the Ontario Ombudsman that said MPAC withheld information from taxpayers fighting their assessment and was not transparent or fair.

Baxter said MPAC, funded by all Ontario municipalities to classify and value property for taxation purposes, to

handle appeals and provide enumeration information, has fulfilled 10 of the 20 recommendations from the Ombudsman and now offers full disclosure to taxpayers prior to a hearing.

In Halton Hills there are 19,400 properties with a total assessed value of \$6.7-billion.

Baxter said adjustments to assessments will be carried forward to the next year; they will provide more information to property owners and improve communications and education.

Last year, 314 property owners, unhappy with their assessments, filed requests for reconsideration and there were 163 direct appeals to the Assessment Review Board.

Baxter could not say how many were successful when questioned by Acton Councillor Clark Somerville, who said the success rate would be a more "telling tale" of changes at MPAC.

"The trend that we found is roughly half of those re-

quested for reconsiderations resulted in an adjustment to the assessment and/or the classification," Baxter said, adding not all of the Review Board complaints have been scheduled.

Somerville asked about assessments of people, who want to stay on farms, some in the Georgetown South area, where land is being bought by speculators who want to "grow houses."

Baxter said farm assessments are based on farmer-to-farmer sales, and the land loses the benefit of a farm tax rate when it is scraped for development.

Councillor Lewis asked why properties near local quarries and hydro corridors in Halton Hills don't have automatic assessment rate reductions.

Baxter said quarry-blasting impacts vary among quarry area properties and would be assessed on an individual basis.

Baxter said they are working on improvements with

enumeration following complaints of errors and omissions on the voters' list, which MPAC supplies to municipalities, after November's municipal election.

He said MPAC mailed 2.4-million municipal enumeration forms prior to the election and less than 40 per cent were returned, and discussion about requiring people to return enumeration and occupancy questionnaires will occur.

That's good news for Mayor Rick Bonnette – whose father Lou, co-founded an Acton taxpayer group that fought for MPAC fairness – who pointed to problems with the voters' list issued by MPAC before the last election.

"Last year on July 31, we had people that were living in town for at least 30 years (who) were asked if they were a Canadian citizen and they were very upset," Bonnette said, adding the Town bore the cost of sending out 3,000 letters to clarify citizenship.

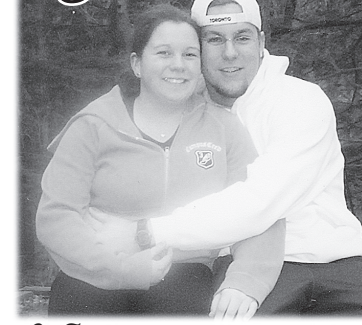
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Jessie & Andrew on your engagement.
Wedding to take place July 21, 2007.

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Congratulations



Lynn & Steve on your engagement.
Wedding to take place August 17, 2007.

Love the Watson, Hellinga and McGillivray families