

Councillor debates benefit of Uxbridge gravel industry

UXBRIDGE TWP. — Private and municipal pit operators are digging \$10,000,000 worth of gravel out of Uxbridge Twp. a year for a total business tax payment of less than \$50,000, councillor Clark T. Muirhead said this week.

"They are leaving a moon-cratered band across the township where with recent Ontario legislation Toronto may dump its garbage down our throats."

A professional engineer and Metro industrialist who commutes daily from his Uxbridge Twp. home, Mr. Muirhead has now documented with aerial photographs, assessment analysis and engineering data, his war against gravel pit encroachment which he personally took to the Ontario Municipal Board two years ago.

He lost that battle but was launched on to Uxbridge Township Council at the next election by fellow residents who share his concern about the 24-hour-a-day gravel truck traffic, denuded countryside, hazardous, worked-out pits, and deterioration of property values adjacent to gravel works.

Based on a study of Uxbridge assessment rolls and an aerial photographic survey he commissioned last month, Mr. Muirhead claims:

"Approximately 4,200 acres of the township is now owned by gravel companies or is in municipally owned gravel operations. This does not include land under option to gravel firms."

"Most of the pits are privately owned but various municipalities have



A gravel pit site on conc. 7, Uxbridge Twp., north of County Road 1A.



Typical of 40 gravel pits in Uxbridge Twp., this one is just north-east of the hamlet of Goodwood.

gravel pits in Uxbridge Twp. — Pickering Township, Ontario County, Whitby Twp. Uxbridge itself.

"The value of gravel being sold out of Uxbridge pits can be conservatively estimated at at least \$10,000,000. This is based on an extraction of a minimum five million tons a year which is trucked out of Uxbridge."

An analysis of about half of the gravel pit acreage — 2,000 acres out of the total 4200 acres we have established on the assessment rolls — shows that 28 of the private op-

erators last year paid a total of \$23,731 in commercial and business taxes. On this basis it is estimated that commercial and business tax revenue from the total gravel operations netted Uxbridge less than \$50,000.

"A typical 100-acre gravel property in Uxbridge will likely yield five million tons of gravel in ten years before it is mined out and abandoned. In that time the operators will extract \$50,000 worth of gravel, which after hauling and processing will sell for about \$10,000,000, Mr. Muir calculates. And

in ten years that operator will pay about \$10,000 all told in commercial and business taxes. Once the pit is worked out, the tax revenue is negligible."

Uxbridge Twp. Council and Planning Board have spent "hundreds of man-hours trying to gain some measure of control over the gravel operations. We have tried in our Official Plan recently passed; in the Zoning By-law which is nearly ready for passing and in a draft by-law to regulate pit operations. But there is not much chance of saving the countryside, and gaining

some fair tax return unless there are changes in provincial legislation," Councillor Muirhead says. Residents are concerned because gravel operators are at present under no legal obligation to restore destroyed lands or to repair the damage their trucks do to township roads. There is no control on their hours of operation, day or night.

Pickering Twp. opened a 70-acre pit on the Sixth Concession of Uxbridge and truck traffic forced one nearby resident to move out after 17 years in which the property had

been built to a value of \$50,000. Other residents are looking for buyers of their properties. Pickering pays Uxbridge \$200 a year for use of the pit.

Until recent years land values were low in Uxbridge Twp. and farmers working marginal land or nearing retirement often found that gravel operators offered the only reasonable price for their farms. But Uxbridge with its scenic hills and proximity to Metro Toronto is now on the fringe of development, says the councillor. "We could expect more population in the

next ten years than we have had in the past century. We could have a high quality environment with permanent and steadily increasing tax revenue — if we don't abandon a large part of the township to gravel mining."

Mr. Muirhead wants specific action from the Ontario Government. The Assessment Act should be amended to permit municipal taxation at gravel pits on a more realistic basis. The Ontario Highway Traffic Act should be enforced with regard to tonnage carried by gravel

trucks on Class B roads. No municipality should be forced to accept garbage dumping in its gravel pits from another municipality.

He contends that the gravel could be economically drawn from more remote and cheaper, uninhabited lands. "There are millions of square miles of empty land in Canada with large sources of gravel. There are extensive regions uninhabited and semi-barren even in southern Ontario. The gravel industry could readily move their product to market on a massive

scale by train and I am sure the railroads could haul gravel at lower cost than trucks."

"Most major cities in Canada and the United States, in fact, get their gravel from considerable distances and they haul it by rail," he points out.

Uxbridge Twp. itself needs about 15,000 tons of gravel a year for its own roads. The gravel operators in the township don't bother to bid on crushing and hauling it. Uxbridge Twp. has to bring in outside contractors to process its own gravel.



Gravel operations are located on both sides of County Road 1A, east of the Brock Road. This view looks north-west toward Coppins' Corners. —McLeod & Yee

Editor's mail

Dear Sir:

In reference to your comment on the editorial page on recent accidents at Ringwood, I would suggest the Highway Dept. erect signs reducing the speed to 30 or even 25 miles per hour in this area.

This is common policy in other small communities and it is apparent that the present 40 mile per hour limit is too fast. Truck drivers are businessmen and no one can blame them if they attempt to save a few minutes by beating the lights. A 25 m.p.h. speed zone would discourage this and would also give them time to stop in an emergency.

The cost of the change would be very little. It would be necessary for police to enforce the law, however.

If the suggestion seems valid, perhaps it should be passed on to the proper authorities.

Sincerely,
(Mrs.) Frank Bielby

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