

Quarry queries in Granville Centre



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We're not "a Bilcon," says proponent

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A group of residents from the communities of Granville Centre and Belle Isle looking for information surrounding a proposed quarry on the North Mountain, say that thus far, their inquiries have largely been unsatisfied.

Fred and Jacquie Martin, and Diane and Robert Surette say that they are four out of over 45 individuals living nearby the proposed quarry site in Granville Centre who have questions or concerns about the potential operation, which was advertised in the Spectator May 31. The advertisement also indicated that citizens with comments or questions could contact the proponent, with a deadline for submissions of June 29.

In accordance with the ad, the two couples, along with others in the community, have been writing letters to the proponent, Bridgetown's B. Spicer Construction Ltd, and sending copies of their correspondences to the Department of Environment and Labour, and to MLA Stephen McNeil, in the hopes of finding out more information about Spicer's application and the potential effects on their communities of the proposed development. "I guess there's this black hole," says Jacquie Martin. "There's been no response from Environment and Labour [and] no acknowledgement from copies to Stephen McNeil."

While the Martins received a written reply from Spicer to their first letter, the couple indicate that it did not answer all their queries, such as a description of the truck routes that would be used in transporting the aggregate. The couples have since taken part in two meetings for concerned citizens to meet with one another, one held at the Bridgetown Lions Hall on June 19, and another organized recently by Annapolis Royal resident and activist Jerry Ackerman. "We exchanged concerns," says Robert Surette regarding the earlier meeting, "but the main concern was that nobody knew anything."

The couples also express apprehension about the process of applying for quarry operations itself and the lack of public input required by the provincial guidelines. As the proposed 9.06919-acre quarry is less than four hectares, the proponent is not required to do an environmental assessment of the project or hold public hearings. "In a way, we don't know what to be afraid of," says Fred Martin.

He adds that with the potential for increased noise due to trucks, blasting and crushing, for impacts of the quarry on well water for surrounding properties, for smoke and dust issues, and for negative effects on tourism due to a

visible quarry scar on the North Mountain, there are many unknowns to the potential operation that have yet to be determined. "Like most other people [in this community], we planned a quiet place for retirement," says Robert, concerned that the proposed quarry could interfere with the peacefulness of the surrounding communities.

The couples have written to Mark Parent, minister of Environment and Labour, requesting that local residents be allowed to review the proponent's complete site plan. In addition, they have recommended that the minister request a full site survey to be conducted by provincial departmental experts, so that it can be determined whether there are any issues with respect to the disturbance of heritage sites, wetlands, land, surface and ground water, and other issues of concern. They have also asked for a full environmental assessment and that a steering committee be established to recommend best practice guidelines for the future development on or near the North Mountain. The letter added that the stakeholders should have the exact details of the size of the quarry as stated in Office Guide, including roadways constructed for the operation. In this case, says Surette, including the access road in, the size of the quarry would make the site larger than four hectares.

At this point, he adds, now that the deadline for submissions has passed, the group is still waiting to hear back from Environment and Labour as to what the next step in this process will be. They are also puzzled as to why there has been activity on the site since last winter, given that a permit has yet to be issued.

THE NEXT STEP

Steve Sanford, an inspection specialist with NSEL, was responsible for inspecting the proposed site after receiving the application from Spicer. He explains that further inspections of the site would need to occur before the proponent's application could be guaranteed, adding that the department would use a standard scoring template during such inspections to determine the risks associated with the environment. Sanford says that so far, the activity on site has been limited to land development, such as the removal of trees, which is not subject to provincial approval.

While the department is reviewing the application, says Sanford, his current role is to review the comments and questions sent to the proponent and to insure that these are properly addressed. At some point, Sanford will be meeting with the proponent to review these submissions from citizens. "There are certainly a numerous volume of them (submissions)," says Sanford. "The process, as advertised, is basically to make contact with the proponent... [This develops a] relationship between the community and the proponent."

If the proponent were successful, the department would issue a 10-year industrial approval. If the company wishes to continue to operate beyond this period of time, an application for renewal would have to be made and the process of public submissions would start over again, Sanford explains.

WE'RE NOT BILCON

Bruce Spicer, owner of the construction company, has been having a difficult time of it as well, now going into the third month of the application process. He says that the suspicions of the community have been a source of frustration, and he does not understand why people are treating the project as if it would have the same impact as a project such as the proposed mega quarry on the Digby Neck. "I don't know why we're being lumped in with the Bilcons," says Spicer. "We're talking about supporting the local economy."

For lack of a better description, the owner attributes the public's response to a NIMBY – Not in my back yard – scenario, and says that many of the questions were of a "ridiculous" nature. "They're asking us about highway issues and 'what about the mailman?'" says Spicer. "We went to a great extent on this one to meet the guidelines. Environment looked at it, saying that this is the best application that [they've] seen so far."

He adds that while Spicer Construction was not required to seek public input, they advertised their proposal and request for submissions at the request of NSDEL. Spicer further notes he has been trying to arrange a public meeting with the department, but has gotten the impression that the province would prefer to hold two separate meetings, one with the proponent and another with NSDEL.

MLA's PERSPECTIVE

As a Granville Centre resident and elected official, MLA Stephen McNeil says that he has made inquiries to NSDEL a couple times, as well as requested that a public meeting be held, though he has not heard back from the

department as of yet. "My concern is we have guidelines," he says. "We need to make sure those guidelines are being followed to the fullest extent."

McNeil adds that citizens' concerns about the environment, particularly the quarry's effect on well water, are valid, and should be responded to by either the proponent or the department. "I met a couple of them (concerned citizens), individual members that have come to speak to me," he says. "All [their concerns] are legitimate ones I feel need to be addressed."

Nonetheless, if the rules and regulations are being followed, he says, there is nothing anybody can do to prevent the quarry from locating on the site, given that there are other existing quarries on the North Mountain. "The issue is has that company followed the regulations in front of them," explains McNeil. "If they have, you can't stop them. "You can't say one company can [operate a quarry] and another can't."

While he is opposed to the development of mega quarries, exporting aggregates to another country, McNeil says that he is not opposed to small-sized pits and quarries meeting the needs of the local market.