

Media Release

Packed meeting seeks to stop dumping of contaminated soil

(Port Perry, ON – November 23, 2010) Over a hundred people filled the seats and lined the walls for a community information meeting at Ocala Winery on Monday evening, November 22.

Public officials, politicians and local citizens found common ground in their efforts to protect the ground water of the Oak Ridges Moraine.

They were responding to dumping of contaminated soil at an old gravel pit located at 13471 Lakeridge Road, 23 km north of Whitby, just beyond a frequently used source of spring water near Chalk Lake. Thousands of truckloads of fill, some coming from Toronto industrial sites, have been dumped there since Earthworx purchased the property in May.

The meeting was organized by *Lakeridge Citizens for Clean Water*, a newly-formed group whose numbers are likely to soar in the coming weeks, judging by the turnout last night.

Special guests included Scugog Mayor, Marilyn Pearce, Mayor Elect Chuck Mercier and all of the incoming Councillors, as well as the Township's CAO and Director of Public Works. The Township of Uxbridge was represented by Mayor Elect Gerri Lynn O'Connor and Councillors Bev Northeast and Jacob Mantle, plus their CAO and Clerk.

District Manager Dave Fumerton spoke for Ontario's Ministry of the Environment about the steps that they are taking to determine where the soil is coming from and what danger it may pose to the aquifer. His officials are conducting on-going soil audits.

Durham MPP John O'Toole described his efforts to get the Provincial Government to deal with the issue, given that the municipalities do not have the capacity to judge what is being dumped or to stop the dumping.

This point was echoed by Debbie Gordon, from STORM (Save the Oak Ridges Moraine), who pointed out there were many old abandoned gravel pits across the Moraine that were becoming targets for commercial fill operations.

Many of those present were worried about the impact of the Earthworx site on their drinking water. Rob Messervey of Kawartha Conservation Authority indicated that the Conservations Areas have four wells in the area surrounding the Earthworx's dump site and will be monitoring for any contamination. We feel that further monitoring may be necessary

Although MP Bev Oda sent a staff person, there was some disappointment that she could not get someone from Transport Canada to clarify their role in regulating aerodrome facilities. Eartworx has declared the dump site to be an "aerodrome" in the hope that they might escape municipal or provincial jurisdiction. Bev Oda has confirmed in writing that the province retains responsibility to protect the local water supply but it is unclear if the whole project could be declared illegal on that basis.

The organizers of the meeting were satisfied that most of their goals were achieved. "We learned that dumping problems are widespread, although it is not clear how serious they are; we learned who has jurisdiction over what; what each body is doing or not able to do; and how they could help one another move forwards faster," said spokesperson Ian McLaurin. "But people remain frustrated that the dumping has not stopped."

The problem is clearly widespread across the Moraine as many commercial fill operators appear to be dumping as many loads as possible before new provincial regulations kick in next July.

It should be noted that these new regulations will make it more difficult to move contaminated soils, but further regulations are required to govern commercial fill operations – and to protect the Moraine aquifer.

Meanwhile, the Township has prepared an injunction to stop the dumping, but that could lead to a very costly and drawn-out legal fight.

There may be another option, as McLaurin noted, "People were pleased to hear the Mayor of Scugog call for a Ministerial Order that would stop dumping until new legislation is in place." Her call was supported by MPP John O'Toole, by the STORM coalition and by the Mayor Elect from Uxbridge, who offered to take it to the upcoming meeting of GTA Rural Mayors.

Lakeridge Citizens for Clean Water are stepping up the pressure and organizing a follow-up meeting for December 8th. Details will be posted on their new website, www.LakeridgeCitizens.ca

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