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Oct 16, 2013

You protest \$7M fill operation in Baldwin

More than 100 people sign petition on what many say amounts to commercial scheme



FILL OPPOSITION CROWD

Heidi Riedner

Residents packed both floors of council chambers Monday to present an almost 100-signature petition and their concerns over what they call a commercial fill site on agricultural land that, if approved, would bring an estimated 70,000 dump truck loads of fill to the tiny hamlet for the next four years and detrimentally affect their neighbourhood.

“Is this really the kind of use we want for this land in Georgina?” she asked. She, as well as other residents, also raised the possibility of well and soil contamination, huge volumes of truck traffic and

noise and dust pollution as a result of the operation that could create piles of dirt as high as 40 feet in some areas.

Georgina Advocate

By [Heidi Riedner](#)

For the second time in as many months, you came out in droves, armed with a petition and a list of concerns in opposition to large-scale fill operations on agricultural lands.

And the town's 2011 bylaw regulating fill sites may be placed under moratorium while it is under review, even though it is being offered as a standard to other watershed communities.

Reading notes from Baldwin resident Paul Nichols on behalf of Audubon Acres residents, Debbie Molnar said a permit to allow the owner of a Smith Boulevard property just east of the subdivision and Hwy. 48 to bring in about 700,000 cubic metres of clean fill raises "serious concerns".

If approved, the operation would become the town's second large-scale fill site and largest in terms of volume since the implementation of strict regulations in 2011, according to an engineering staff report published last week as part of Monday's public meeting.

"How would any of you feel if 70,000 trucks were going by your house?"

The final amount of fill, however, is yet to be determined since project consultants will incorporate council and public comments in a final application.

Approving Marvin Blanchard's request to bring in what would amount to 70,000 dump trucks of fill for each of the next four years during the span of the project to create more arable land to grow alfalfa and hay on a roughly 40-acre parcel of land "just doesn't make sense", read Ms Molnar, adding the application's ultimate purpose is a commercial fill operation rather than farming.

Comparing the estimated revenue from crop yield with that derived per dump truck of soil, Ms Molnar said Mr. Blanchard stands to make \$7 million for providing a place for the fill rather than \$30,000, at most, for an average crop.

"Is this really the kind of use we want for this land in Georgina?" she asked. She, as well as other residents, also raised the possibility of well and soil contamination, huge volumes of truck traffic and noise and dust pollution as a result of the operation that could create piles of dirt as high as 40 feet in some areas.

"All ditches lead to my home on that street," said Sarah Smith, who lives just east of the Blanchard property.

In addition to concerns over water, Ms Smith had a serious issue with 70,000 dump trucks potentially passing by her house during the next four years to get to the site.

“How would any of you feel if 70,000 trucks were going by your house?” she asked.

Audubon Acres resident Mabel Garcia said she wasn’t willing to gamble her family’s well water or quality of life on “making hay”.

Ms Molnar handed over an almost 100-signature petition against the application in addition to a request for the town to view it in the context of a commercial enterprise and for council to prohibit a commercial fill operation in Georgina.

While the town’s bylaws allow for certain temporary uses on agricultural lands, Jan Oros said four years of dumping fill is not a temporary use.

‘How would any of you feel if 70,000 trucks were going by your house?’

Furthermore, if approved, the application would be granted under “false pretenses” since it is not to facilitate farming, in his opinion, adding the issue points out “grey areas” in Georgina’s site alteration process that regulates the movement and placement of fill.

Mayor Rob Grossi and Ward 2 Councillor Phil Craig agreed, suggesting Georgina’s bylaw may need “tightening up” when it comes to issues such as volume, height and adequate soil testing.

Whether such an operation was good planning in such close proximity to a residential neighbourhood was also an issue.

But the town’s zoning bylaw regulating land use can’t be used as a lever to stop the application, according to the town’s director of planning and building, Harold Lenters.

The process involved under the site alteration bylaw would determine if the operation falls under good planning or not, Mr. Lenters said.

Ward 5 Councillor Brad Smockum agreed, adding the application process should be played out.

“Mr. Blanchard has done everything the bylaw asks. Let’s finish it out.”

That includes extensive engineering analysis, as well as clearances and approvals from various agencies, including the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority, and a \$350,000 security paid to the town to cover any resulting repair to town infrastructure as a result of the operation.

Consultants for the project also said no interruption to the well water supply is anticipated.

In addition, monitoring of the water supply would continue for the four-year duration of the project and for two years following completion to ensure protection of the local aquifer and surrounding wells, according to the engineering report.

But staff has yet to be advised from where the fill will come or received analysis reports to ensure it's not contaminated.

Before any fill can be brought on to the site, the consulting engineer or geotechnical consultant would be required to submit soil analysis reports along with written confirmation the fill is clean under Environment Ministry standards.

In addition, the owner's geotechnical consultant would be responsible to conduct monthly sampling and testing of all materials imported to the site to ensure compliance with quality requirements under the town's environmental protocol.

Not quite sure why the property couldn't be turned in its current condition to yield crops, the mayor stated outright he would not be in favour of a commercial fill site.

Mayor Grossi and Councillor Craig voted against letting the application play out, but were defeated in a recorded vote of 5-2.

Unlike the site alteration permit to excavate 180,000 cubic metres of fill on a Country Mile Lane property known as the old Sabbath farm for the construction of a 12-acre pond for private use, which was denied, the "Baldwin 33" application for the Blanchard property will come before council after staff comes back with a report to council incorporating how various issues raised by the public and council will be addressed.

First and foremost of those will be an opinion from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs as to how much fill would be required to make the land arable.

In a separate recorded vote, council voted 4-3 in favour of a staff report weighing the options of issuing a moratorium on the site alteration bylaw while it is under review and possible revision.

Councillors Szollosy, Davison and Craig, as well as the mayor, voted in favour.