

TML Official Plan Review Meeting – March 22

Highlights

A Special Planning Committee Meeting was held on March 22, as part of the Township of Muskoka Lakes Official Plan Review process. Meridian Consultants, headed by Nick McDonald, presented a report suggesting revisions to the Draft Official Plan, based on public feedback received last fall (e-mails, letters, open house meetings, online survey). I have serious concerns about this report, with respect to some comments that Mr. McDonald made about key policies related to the aggregate industry in the [Meridian Memorandum, L6 – Aggregates, pp. 23-24](#)

The first section on Aggregates is satisfactory -

Many residents continue to request that the current prohibition on rock crushing in the existing Official Plan apply to all components of a mineral aggregates operation within 2 kilometres of an Urban Centre or Waterfront designation, presumably in response to the proposed Lippa pit and quarry.

In response to these comments, the Planning Committee has directed that the Official Plan include such a prohibition, and it is included in Section K4 of the draft Official Plan.

However, the next section is a major concern -

The basis for this 2 kilometre restriction is unknown, and it is my opinion that any applicant has the ability to submit an application to amend the Official Plan and provide appropriate justification for a proposal to develop a pit or quarry , wherever the property is located, even if it is within the 2 kilometre setback from Urban centres and the Waterfront Area.

In my opinion, this is a very inappropriate statement that serves to undermine the **two-kilometre restriction policy**. To say that, “**The basis for this 2 kilometre restriction is unknown ...**”, is misleading at best. As stated by Mr. McDonald, in the first section, many residents have requested that this policy should be included in the next draft of the OP, but he fails to mention that they also gave their reasons for wanting this to be done, including concerns about noise, concerns about water pollution, concerns about increased truck traffic,

concerns about silica dust, to name a few. Reasons, such as these, should be included in the new Official Plan, so that there is no doubt about the **basis for this policy**. In my opinion, Mr. McDonald demonstrates a pro-aggregate-industry bias, and this should not be allowed to distort the OP review process!

In the next section, Mr. McDonald introduces another policy that deals with the siting of new pits and quarries, and again there are reasons for concern - ***In addition to the above, the existing Official Plan in Section F 14.7 establishes the following criterion when considering the siting of an aggregate pit: "Site is located in close proximity to provincial highway". Planning Committee has directed that the new Official Plan include such a policy in the next draft. As per the response above, the requested policy can be included; however, it is my opinion that any applicant has the ability to submit an application to amend the Official Plan and provide appropriate justification for a proposal to develop a pit or quarry, wherever the property is located.***

In my opinion, Mr. McDonald is being very negative in his comment about this policy, and he seems to be trying to undermine it, rather than trying to support it. Instead of pointing out how an applicant might try to overcome this policy, why not give some reasons for supporting this policy? For example, why not explain how this policy could help to save the Township of Muskoka Lakes a great deal of money in terms of road maintenance costs, by cutting down the number of heavy trucks using municipal roads?

In summary, I am pleased that these two policies that deal with the siting of new quarries and pits, are going to be included in the next draft Official Plan. However, I think that it is very important that the reasons for these policies are also included, so that there will be no doubt in terms of intent.

During the Planning Committee meeting on March 22, several speakers addressed concerns about the need to strengthen policies regulating the siting of new pits and quarries, and the following links provide some of the highlights -

Susan Eplett, delegating on behalf of the Muskoka Lakes Association, spoke about the importance of policies to limit the negative impacts of the the aggregate industry on the environment, and the need for policies in the TML Official Plan to reflect the priorities of the local community, rather than being

overly influenced by the Provincial Policy Statement. In the [meeting video, watch from 15:40](#)

Linda Haslam-Stroud, delegating on behalf of the Skeleton Lake Cottagers' Organization, spoke about the potential threats posed to the natural environment and our communities by the aggregate industry, and the need for strong, unambiguous policies to deal with these threats. In the [meeting video, watch from 30:00](#)

Councillor Gordon Roberts spoke about the need for aggregate policies to reflect the high level of concern coming from his constituents, and he also suggested that the Meridian consultant should refrain from making comments that could be interpreted as undermining key policies related to regulation of the aggregate industry. In the [meeting video, watch from 5:10:30](#)

The new Official Plan will be vital in terms of our campaign to block the Lippa quarry application, and looking further ahead, it will be vital in terms of giving us the tools to fight future quarry applications that could threaten the natural environment, especially our lakes and waterways. It is now very clear that we must be vigilante, and when the next draft of the Official Plan is released this summer, we must scrutinize all policies related to the aggregate industry in great detail to make sure that these policies accurately reflect our concerns.

Tom

tom.smp@icloud.com

stopmuskokapit.ca

facebook.com/stopmuskokapit