A Major Controversy Brews Over Competing Land Uses in North Dufferin County

HONEYWOOD, ONTARIO--(Marketwire - June 23, 2009) - A major controversy is brewing between concerned residents of North Dufferin County and the owners of the largest land assembly in the region, one that will truly test the land use and environmental priorities of the Ontario Government. The McGuinty Government has generated considerable fanfare with its commitments to the protection of prime agricultural lands and ground water resources. A growing body of legislation and policies have been put into place, representing a welcome paradigm shift in how the Province's natural and non-renewable resources are to be protected. Despite these very positive reforms, they will mean very little in places like Dufferin County if the Government's long standing aggregate extraction policies, which favour the aggregate industry, are allowed to prevail over other, environmentally sensitive and sustainable priorities.

Over 6,000 acres of prime agricultural land have been assembled over the past few years north of Shelburne in Melancthon and Mulmur Townships by The Highland Companies. The lands have been acquired through several numbered companies and the acquisitions have allegedly been financed by a Boston, Massachusetts based hedge fund. The Highland Companies have recently advised the Township of Melancthon that an application for a quarry licence is imminent. The Highland Companies' landholdings rival in land mass the world's largest limestone quarry located in Rogers City, Michigan.

The area in question is well renowned for its specialty soils, known as Honeywood Loam, which have been farmed for over 150 years, supplying approximately 50% of all potato crops requirements for the nearby Toronto market, both for direct consumption and via the processing of potato based food products. In addition, the immediate area contains a system of underground streams and rivers, as well as fragile water recharge areas, which form the headwaters of the Nottawasaga and Grand River systems which in turn directly feed into the Great Lakes.

The area is also home to large deposits of limestone and aggregate, which contribute to the drainage and quality of the local soils, and make them agriculturally unique. Since acquiring the land, the new owners have been conducting well and hydrological testing, archaeological studies, tree, fence and house removals, and other activities throughout their landholdings, which have led local residents to suspect that the limestone and aggregate deposits are the major target and end game behind the land assembly, and that plans for a massive quarry is in the works.

Public meetings were held in January and June of this year and attended by hundreds of concerned citizens. The residents have formed a non-profit organization, The North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Taskforce, Inc. (or NDACT), to represent the community's interests.

NDACT is concerned with the potential and permanent loss of this prime agricultural resource, and has made an application to Melancthon and Mulmur Townships and the Municipality of Grey Highlands to have this unique vegetable growing area protected and designated as Specialty Crop Lands, consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement and similar to the land use designations attached to the Holland Marsh, Thornbury Apple Orchards and Niagara Wine areas, which are similarly located within close proximity to the Toronto market.

Most recently, The Ontario Federation of Agriculture unanimously passed a resolution supporting NDACT's proposed Specialty Crop Designation for this area.

The owners of the land assembly have also been negotiating the acquisition of the rail line between Streetsville (Mississauga) and Orangeville, as well as the currently abandoned rail corridor between Orangeville and Owen Sound, giving rise to speculation that the area will be transformed from a rural, agricultural setting to a major industrial aggregate extraction operation that will be transporting mined materials to markets outside of Ontario through rail connections to the Great Lakes system. A large portion of the abandoned rail corridor is currently being used for hiking and snowmobiling trails and other recreational uses.

NDACT is of the view that the potential loss of this prime agricultural land use, as well as the potential impact on the headwaters of these two major river systems, is not only a local issue, but rather, a matter of Provincial significance which should be of deep concern to all residents of Ontario. Agricultural land is a finite resource, and is disappearing rapidly through urban sprawl. Despite hundreds of millions of Ontario taxpayer dollars being directed toward developing and implementing the Greenbelt Act, Safe Drinking Water Act and
the Clean Water Act, current Provincial policies appear to favour aggregate over food, farmland and water. Although aggregate resources are required to satisfy the Province's requirements to build new roads and infrastructure, there needs to be a balance between those requirements and the inherent right of the Province's citizens to have a reliable and permanent self-sustaining source of food and water resources.

Of equal concern is the fragility of the ground water recharge system in this area, which acts as the headwaters for the Nottawasaga and Grand Rivers. This area has been determined by scientific study, through a document entitled The AEMOT Study, to be an extremely vulnerable water recharge system. The study was commissioned by Melancthon Township and 4 other municipalities in 2002, in the wake of the Walkerton tragedy.

There are many other areas in the Province where limestone and aggregate can be mined and where these activities would not be in conflict with precious agricultural and water resources. The question which all citizens of Ontario should be asking of their elected representatives is whether the Province has the foresight to clarify its historical aggregate policies with a view to preserving and protecting these agricultural and water resources on behalf of its citizens before the damage becomes irreversible.

In addition, residents (living both within and outside of the directly affected areas) and environmental and other organizations should voice their concerns by contacting their local and Provincial elected representatives.

For more information, please contact

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WHEREAS the Highland Companies has amassed land holdings in Melancthon and Mulmur Townships in the County of Dufferin of over 6,000 acres of prime agricultural land in the past few years;

AND FURTHER the immediate area contains a system of underground streams and rivers, as well as fragile water recharge areas, which form the headwaters of the Grand and Nottawasaga River systems which in turn directly feed into the Great Lakes;

AND FURTHER more than 38 municipalities and 925,000 people live within the Grand River watershed and could be potentially impacted by this open pit limestone mine;

AND FURTHER the Highland Companies' landholdings rival in land mass the world's largest limestone quarry located in Rogers City, Michigan;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT we hereby request that Melancthon Council and Mulmur Council vigorously defend and protect the Grand River watershed from the threat to the Grand River system that is posed by the open pit mine by the Highland Companies
G.W. JORDEN Planning Consultants Limited

80 WORSLEY STREET, BARRIE, ONTARIO L4M 1L8

June 11, 2009

Ms. Denise B. Holmes
CAO/Clerk-Treasurer
Township of Melancthon
R. R. #6
Shelburne, ON L0N 1S9

VIA EMAIL

Dear Ms. Holmes:

The Highland Companies

The following information relates to my meeting with representatives of The Highland Companies on May 27th, 2009.

At their request, I met with Mr. Lowndes and Mr. Daniher of The Highland Companies and their planning consultant, Mr. Dyment. They said they will be proceeding with an aggregate application probably within the next 3 to 6 months. The actual timing will depend on the completion of their related technical studies. The application will be for a quarry with extraction below the water table.

They indicated that the haul route would involve only County Road 124 with no use of Township roads. They also said that within the quarry there would be progressive rehabilitation back to agricultural use. They indicated that they have researched this aspect extensively.

They advised that there would be a truck marshaling area within the site to avoid having trucks waiting on the public road. All of the related buildings, conveyor systems and similar facilities would be enclosed thereby reducing noise impacts.

We also discussed Township application requirements and procedures. I noted that the Township will require the full documentation as required by the Ministry of Natural Resources for the quarry license application. I also advised that on major applications such as this, there is a requirement for a pre-application consultation meeting with appropriate Township staff and consultants.

The company representatives were interested in the possibility of a pre-application meeting with Council and some form of pre-application session with the public, possibly an open house session. I advised that they are welcome to undertake any type of public pre-application information program that they may wish to pursue. It was clearly explained that the Township supports and encourages the provision of full information as early in the process as possible.

I would suggest that Council be advised of the results of this meeting with company representatives and that they consider and advise the proponents if they have any preferences or concerns with regard to pre-application information sessions with Council and the public.

Sincerely,

G. W. Jorden, RPP

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