

Represent the cottagers and the business community

To the editor,

I am writing in response to the article "Local MPP says Ontario needs aggregate."

As a cottager on Spurr Lake who is very concerned about the possibility of a quarry being located on the Freymond property, I am surprised that the Prince Edward Hastings MPP would make a public statement that is factually questionable, highly biased in favour of Freymonds, and very insulting to local residents and cottagers.

First, Mr. Smith needs to learn and respect the views of both sides in the debate. When he dismisses the opposition to the quarry by stating, "I suspect a little bit that the misinformation that is out there is being exaggerated by those who have a cause that they've taken up," he creates the perception that those who question the quarry are simply a group of agitators who are too emotional to learn the facts. After spending a year researching aggregate extraction legislation, the Hastings County official plan, the reports of other citizen groups who have dealt with quarry proposals, and monitoring an OMB pre-hearing dealing with the Rockwood quarry application, Freymond quarry application, I resent Mr. Smith's off-hand remarks about those of us who care deeply about what happens locally. Need I remind our MPP that he represents all of us in Hastings County and not just the business community. We are citizens with legitimate concerns who are exercising our democratic right to express our views and participate in decision-making. Should I have to remind him that his job is to listen and learn before making any statement for or against the quarry, or has he already made his decision based solely on the arguments provided by the Freymonds and the powerful aggregate industry lobby?

What is the evidence on which he bases his statement that Ontario needs more quarries to meet the demands of future infrastructure development? The research that I have done doesn't support this conclusion. For example, quarries in Wellington County are taking only 23 per cent of their capacity according to a recent Ontario Federation of Agriculture study. The Guelph quarries are much closer to the GTA where the aggregate will be needed. Why are the quarries not working to capacity if there is such a need? What are the comparable figures for Hastings County? Are more quarries really needed, or are the aggregate companies simply taking the stone that is most easily extracted because the profit is greater? These figures are of course difficult to obtain because the aggregate companies are allowed to file their own reports with few provincial inspectors to check their accuracy. Perhaps Mr. Smith could look into this before agreeing with the conclusions of the aggregate industry.

Also, he claims that the Freymond quarry will create all kinds of jobs locally. Really? According to the information I have seen, Freymonds anticipates the creation of four full-time jobs. How is this a significant benefit to the economy of a county that desperately needs jobs? We have the potential to be another Muskoka, but instead it appears that we want to drive down land values and discourage cottagers and tourists who bring money into the county. And property values will go down; in fact, they already have. To quote the Lansink Appraisal and Consulting document for Oxford County which shows actual sales figures after the Cremeuse Lime Pit was announced (even before the pit went into operation), real estate values dropped from 8.57% up to 39.36% depending upon proximity to the pit site. "The creation of a pit or quarry creates apprehension in the general public, which makes the property less desirable and thus diminishes the prices of neighbouring property (source: Lansink Appraisal and Consulting Case Study Analyses at pitsense.ca). According to Mr. Smith, we should wait for further study and we should trust that the Freymonds will do no harm with their quarry. In terms of property values, it is already too late..

Mr. Smith is correct in asserting that we need to wait until all the studies have been completed, which makes his endorsement of the Freymond quarry and his insulting dismissal of anyone who questions it all the more puzzling.

Gerry Watts, Spurr Lake