

'Devil's elbow' has bedeviled Wollaston council



The Old Hastings Road at 'devil's elbow' where Wollaston Township was hoping to reduce the sharpness of the curve on a steep grade.

JIM EADIE Special to This Week

By Jim Eadie

Wollaston Township council has learned that proposed work to improve the safety of Old Hastings Road could in fact be more dangerous than leaving the road alone, according to a contractor who was interested in bidding on the project.

Tim Conlin, owner of local contracting company Conlin Blasting and Excavating, attended the Nov. 17 regular meeting of council with information that he felt would be important for council to know.

Conlin was a military field engineer with extensive training in explosives, road building and heavy equipment work. For the past 20 years he has operated his own business, which has included designing and building roads for various townships.

Wollaston Township has wrestled over the past few years with a roads priority to improve the safety of Old Hastings Road north of Hwy 620 in a location known locally as 'the devil's elbow.'

In this location, the road has a very steep grade, including a sharp curve near the middle of the grade where the roadway literally turns completely back on itself.

Jewell Engineering Consultants were hired by the township to prepare an engineering plan, which would move a portion of the roadway on the hill to remove the sharpness of the curve.

Township road supervisor Kirk McCaw noted that they have been waiting for many months to receive the plan, which has just recently become available to put out for tender.

In October, another contractor was awarded the contract, and worked less than one day before pulling out of the project.

'I have safety concerns about this,' said Conlin.

'The proposed new road is more dangerous than the way the road is now. As an experienced road contractor, that is my opinion. I voiced my concerns to Jennifer [Cohen, township clerk] when I went over the design plan. The original engineer's plan calls for a 15 per cent grade. In this business, if a grade is over 12 per cent, it is highly recommended not to be constructed due to safety concerns. Now the revised plan from the engineer calls for a 17 per cent grade. In my opinion, these designs should never have been accepted or paid for by the taxpayers.' According to Conlin, as the road stands, the grade is closer to 10 per cent.

'To pursue this proposed route will be very, very, very expensive in my opinion. I know how much rock there is up there to be moved,' he said.

'To achieve a safe road, it would take an awful lot of blasting, and you would end up with a huge rock cut in a historic road site. In my opinion, replant the trees that have been cut, and leave it alone.

'We asked for a drawing to show what we would have to do and still achieve a 10 per cent grade,' said McCaw. 'Then we waited all summer for these reports.'

?We didn't want to create a hazard building this road at great cost to the taxpayers, we were trying to achieve due diligence with that corner profile,? said McCaw.

?We did find evidence of historic work there ? I never knew about the hand work there before.?

?My great grandfather probably piled some of those rocks,? said Conlin.

Conlin also offered his suggestions how township roads staff and equipment could be blended into a tender arrangement to potentially save money on future projects.

He also offered to conduct a site visit if council was interested.

Cohen confirmed that the current invoice from Jewell Engineering has not yet been paid, and is being withheld pending more detailed information and discussion with the company.

Councillor Michael Fuerth noted that Jewell had been invited to the meeting to respond to the concerns being expressed.

In the end, council decided to go ahead with the replacement of a culvert at the bottom of the hill next summer by township staff.

Due to environmental wetland constraints, half loads, and weather there is only a small window of opportunity to complete the work.

A representative from Jewell will be invited again to a future meeting.