Update on Sept 25th ARP Decision – Council Killed It

We had honestly hoped for better from the new Council. When they were elected a year ago, they talked the good talk – improved responsiveness, improved accountability, improved transparency. That all appears to have evaporated. Maybe they will redeem themselves on other issues. But, on gravel they have failed miserably for the second time.

Councillor Wright, supported by Councillors Hanson and Kissel, tried to impress upon their colleagues the importance of making at least one last effort to address residents’ concerns. But the rest of Council decided there was no need to listen to the people they were elected to represent. Council, led by Councillor Gautreau, with support from Reeve Boehlke, Councillors McKylor, Schule, and Henn, voted to kill the ARP.

We were particularly surprised by Councillor Gautreau. He attended the last ARP open house at Rock Pointe Church in March 2018. The large crowd there made it perfectly clear that they didn’t like the draft ARP, but they did not want it scrapped. They wanted a gravel policy that ensured that the residents most affected by the negative off-site impacts from gravel production were not sacrificed in exchange for its social benefits.

At that open house, many of you will remember that Councillor Gautreau, along with Councillor Wright, promised to bring forward for Council’s consideration the establishment of a joint resident-industry steering committee to resolve the outstanding issues. People were encouraged because this commitment provided a window for their concerns to actually be incorporated into the County’s gravel policy. Everyone knew that the gap between the draft ARP and an acceptable version was not enormous. If the ARP provided better setbacks, the rest of what was there wasn’t perfect, but it was much better than what residents faced with each ensuing gravel application under the existing rules.

This is what Councillor Wright proposed at the Sept 25th Council meeting. Councillor Gautreau, on the other hand, betrayed his public commitment and voted against what he had earlier promised to champion. To add insult to injury, he then went on to introduce an alternative that must have the gravel industry cheering – scaled back performance standards, with no monitoring or enforcement and, most importantly, no setback requirements or even any guidance for Council regarding appropriate location criteria for gravel pits. Not only does this decision disadvantage residents, it will also favour big gravel relative to the smaller (usually less problematic) gravel pit operators.

It is incomprehensible how the majority on Council – most of whom have little to no experience with gravel issues – can think it is appropriate to completely ignore their colleagues who deal with gravel issues on an ongoing basis. Other than Reeve Boehlke, none of the others who voted to kill the ARP even bothered to attend any of the ARP open houses. To make matters even worse, councillors regularly acknowledge the importance of supporting the local councillor on issues where local knowledge is critical to good decision-making. But, on this complicated and technical issue where gravel production is concentrated in two or three divisions, they chose to flaunt this practice.

The majority on Council has also effectively slapped its residents in the face. The ARP generated more public input than any other initiative the County has ever undertaken. The majority on Council has just told its residents to go away and shut up. There will be no further opportunity for public input on an issue that has generated massive public engagement. The promised public hearing that would have given residents at least one last chance to express their concerns will not happen. September 25th was a very dark day for County residents.

Rocky View Gravel Watch