

Community bands together in opposition to mining project



Sept. 11, 2018

By Nate Smelle

Worried by the news that Pancontinental Resources Corporation (Pancon) had commenced mining explorations in the Limerick area, some 300 concerned citizens converged on the Limerick Community Centre Sunday evening to learn more about what the company has labelled the McBride Project. The room was packed well beyond capacity, with another 50 or more individuals crammed into the hallway entrance, and others listening in from outside through the windows.

Pancon's president/CEO Layton Croft attempted to kick off the meeting by telling a story about his background as an activist for corporate social responsibility. Speaking from his own experience of dealing with a proposed wind farm project near his family's cottage on Lake Michigan, he said it was hard to trust the company when his efforts to engage with them were met with silence. "Frustrated, my ability to give the company the benefit of the doubt waned," said Croft.

"I had less reason to trust the company, since it wouldn't even return my calls. Months later when I was back in Asia for my job I learned that the company was holding a town hall meeting to discuss their proposed wind farm. They decided to do it after all the summer cottagers were gone."

Croft was shut down before he could finish the story by several residents expressing their frustration with Pancon for not consulting with the community before beginning explorations on their land and throughout the drilling area nearby. One of the community members to speak up, was a cottager from Toronto who drove more than three hours to declare her reasons for opposing the mining project underway adjacent to her family cottage.

Stopping Croft in mid-speech, she said "Before we listen to your heartfelt story about your childhood cottage, tell me why you trespassed right now to flag my property, and you didn't even bother to send out a letter to let me know what you were doing. I had to find out from another cottager. Answer me that. You're an activist? How about being an activist for fair treatment to somebody that legally owns property that you didn't just trespass on, you marked up with over 100 flags literally three feet outside my door. Where is the honesty and integrity in that?"

Croft abandoned his story and moved on with his presentation by introducing some of the members of the Pancon team. Angus Ross, president of Hastings Highlands Resources Limited "Pancon's partner on the McBride project" first got involved with mining explorations while working with Pancon's project lead geologist Derek McBride when Limerick Mines Ltd. was heading up the charge to open a nickel, copper and cobalt mine in Limerick back in 2002. After joining the company's audit committee, Ross said he and McBride were kicked off the board because he accused the president of Limerick Mines of misusing flow-through share money. During his introduction he distanced himself from the company stating that he is "not a Pancon employee," and that he was invited to work with Pancon as an "independent individual."

"I am not on the board of Pancon, I do not own any shares, options or warrants of Pancon, I am completely independent," said Ross. "It has taken me over 50 years to build up the environmental reputation that I have, and I can guarantee you that there is no way that

I want to be involved with any project which is likely to cause any lasting damage to the environment.?

Following the rest of the introductions, co-founder of the Limerick Area Conservation Coalition Monika Nikopoulos had the opportunity to speak. Thanking everyone for coming out to the meeting, she first passed around a petition demanding Pancon halt its explorations in Limerick because the community does not want a mine in their backyard. Nikopolous then said she needed to dispel a couple myths about the mining project that she had learned of while going door-to-door to notify her neighbours about Pancon's plans.

Addressing the rumour that mining explorations just disappeared back in 2004 when Ross and McBride were working with Limerick Mines, Nikopoulos said 'What actually happened in 2004, was that Pat and Chuck Potter exposed Mr. McBride by Chuck videotaping Mr. McBride's public presentation, as we are today, where Mr. McBride said, 'This will be the next Sudbury.' Chuck hand-delivered the video tape to the Ontario Security Commission in Ontario and Limerick Mines was investigated. That was the last we heard from Mr. McBride until this past July, when Mr. McBride contacted me because of a no trespassing sign I'd left on my property.?

Scanning the room for Chief James Marsden of the Alderville First Nation to invite him to speak, Nikopoulos noticed he was one of the many attendees listening in through the window. Thanking the hosts for having the opportunity to speak, Marsden said he was glad to see so many people from the community come together to engage the company regarding its intentions. He said the Alderville First Nation is opposed to the project because the company has yet to engage with them in meaningful consultations. 'Consultation is much more than a letter, a telephone call, and an email,' said Marsden.

'We haven't been duly consulted so at this time we oppose this project until we are completely consulted. As the gentlemen said tonight about all the animals he mentioned ' they don't have a voice, so it's up to us to speak on their behalf. I am not a tree-hugger, I love hunting, I love fishing, but I support water, water is life, and I think Mother Earth has been stripped enough and that's where we stand. Megwich.?

After passing the mic to McBride who then accused him of being 'a little forgetful,' Chief Marsden presented a letter to Croft on behalf of the Alderville First Nation calling on Pancon to cease all activities on the site until proper consultation had taken place. Providing the most in-depth presentation of the night, mining watches Canadian program coordinator, Ugo Lapointe spoke next. Indicating that the McBride project is located in the headwaters of Beaver Creek and the Crowe Valley Watershed Conservation Area ' a sensitive area that is home to numerous wetlands, lakes and rivers that provide essential habitat to many species of fish, mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians, including several threatened and endangered species ' he said it is also important to remember that the area is substantially populated by both full-time residents and cottagers who depend on the ecosystem for their drinking water.

Lapointe also highlighted how the local economy depends heavily on this same ecosystem for the recreational and tourism opportunities it harbours.

'We notice that the riskier the projects are financially, the riskier they are environmentally and socially,' Lapointe said.

'We think there are too many mining projects out there that are permitted by our government that should never have been permitted, because they are either financially not viable or too marginal.?

Quantifying the amount of waste generated from a mine the type and size necessary to extract the nickel, copper and cobalt from the McBride project's main area of mineralization, Lapointe said that according to the historical data he obtained from Pancon, such a project would likely leave behind five million tons of mining waste. Due to the sulfide minerals this waste would contain, he said a mining operation in this location could potentially acidify the land and water.

Although the McBride project will require some permits to go ahead with exploration, he said the reality in Ontario is that this province remains the only one in Canada that does not require a comprehensive environmental impact assessment for mining projects.

As the meeting wrapped up, Croft said that Pancon would refrain from drilling until an environmental assessment baseline study had been completed. He also committed that the company would make all the reports and studies it conducts regarding the environmental, social and economic impacts of the McBride project available to the public. Indicating that this was only the first of several public meetings Pancon has planned, Croft acknowledged that they will be looking for a larger venue considering the community's high level of interest in the project.