

April 11, 2024 letter to DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos from Sen. Tom O'Mara and Assemblymember Phil Palmesano

Honorable Basil Seggos
Office of the Commissioner
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
625 Broadway
Albany, New York 12233-0001

Dear Commissioner Seggos:

We welcome this opportunity to join the citizens and communities we represent in expressing our strong opposition to the current application before your department for a proposed 61-acre expansion of the current 14-acre Padua Gravel quarry operation located in the town of Dix, Schuyler County.

Specifically, we urge your department to deny the current, amended application and undertake, at a minimum, the requirement of a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (sEIS) regarding the proposed project.

It is our understanding that you are in receipt of resolutions approved by the Schuyler County Legislature and the village of Watkins Glen, as well as public comments provided by individual citizens and/or their designated representatives, opposing the current application and requesting its revision and further review, through the aforementioned requirement of an sEIS, to address myriad and legitimate areas of concerns prior to any final decision on the proposed expansion of the Padua Gravel Pit.

We unequivocally support the need for the DEC to reject the current application and undertake an sEIS.

As we have noted in previous correspondence, the department's handling of the current, amended application to date has been insufficient and inadequate for proper public comment and participation to carefully and thoroughly review a project of this magnitude and its potential, severely negative impact on the local community.

This project proposes nothing short of a massive, five-fold expansion of the existing mine which, given its location up a steep grade directly above a neighborhood and the center of the iconic Finger Lakes village of Watkins Glen -- as well as nearby Watkins Glen State Park -- has already contributed to flooding, raised longstanding environmental concerns as well as concerns over truck traffic and motorist and pedestrian safety, and, as previously highlighted, poses a negative impact to the regional viewshed so critical and vital to the local tourism economy.

Furthermore, as you are well aware -- and as it has also been outlined in locally approved legislative resolutions and elsewhere -- the process by which this expansion application has been brought forth, dating as far back as 2007, raises troubling and unanswered questions. There has been minimal, at best, public notice provided throughout your department's advancement of this application to its current status -- which is troubling.

In short, the proposed expansion is strongly opposed by local residents, the village of Watkins Glen, and Schuyler County. Community officials are also on record as stating that the mine is currently in violation of its existing permit. Recent reports have revealed your department's issuance of repeated and current violations to Padua Gravel Pit's current owner.

In light of these legitimate and well-founded local concerns, and the range of unanswered questions surrounding the handling of the application by your department, we once again urge you to reject the current application and initiate an sEIS for a careful, extensive, independent, and thorough examination of, among numerous aspects surrounding the proposed expansion of the Padua Gravel Pit, the evolution of the surrounding area throughout the time period this application has been under consideration.

Finally, and once again, we also renew our request that your department provide us with copies of all pertinent records and correspondence between your department and the project applicant during the 16-year period that this application has been under review by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Additionally, we request copies of any and all contracts that your department, the state Department of Transportation, or any other state entity has with the applicant for the purchase of aggregate or other materials from the Padua Gravel operation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this formal public comment and to request your immediate attention and action. If you would like to discuss this request in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact us.

State Senator Tom O'Mara
Assemblyman Phil Palmesano