



Workers on a construction crew work to level the land near the CN railroad where a 225 car rail yard will be built.

Residents fighting rail yard

News

By Michael Di Massa News Staff

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Neighbours who live in the southwest corner of Strathcona County are fighting a rail yard being built on five acres of CN land next to two farms, a home and two nature conservation areas.

John Kristensen said he wasn't notified about the rail yard's construction until May 12, when a representative from a contracting company bidding on the construction knocked on his front door looking to purchase fill material.

"We were the last people to find out," Kristensen said, noting Strathcona County issued a permit for the project last September. "How can anyone plan a project, hire consultants to prepare engineering design drawings, meet with the municipal government, and not bother providing notice to the landowners living right next door?"

Bob Feeney, Cando Contracting director of business development, said the intent was to notify nearby property owners of the rail yard once the environmental impact assessment was completed.

"It would have happened within a couple of weeks of John finding out," he said.

The rail yard, which is being built to store empty petroleum cars for Imperial Oil and its Baseline Road refinery, sits on 5.2 acres owned by CN, Feeney said. Imperial Oil requested that the yard's maximum capacity be able to hold 225 cars.

"These are cars that are in customer service, but have returned after being unloaded," Feeney said. Prior to storing them at the yard, "We'll confirm they are empty and there's no leaking," he added.

The project is within 68 metres of the Trelenberg family's farm and 163 metres from Kristensen's house (and 25 metres from his property line). Another farm is north of the rail yard.

The rail yard is also 25 metres away from the Bretona Pond Buck-for-Wildlife Area and 28 metres from the Bretona ConservAction Area. The Kristensens, Trelenbergs and the county helped turn both areas into recognized nature reserves in the 1980s and they are still used today by people who enjoy watching wildlife and hiking.

Feeney said the site of the rail yard was designated as such by the federal government in the early 1900s. The ordinary railway right-of-way is 100 feet, but every seven or eight miles, the right of way expands to 350 feet to allow for rail yards.

"That's why we chose this location. It's where the property exists that's designated for railway use," Feeney said. The location is also seven miles from the Baseline refinery.

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He and Kristensen both noted that the location has also been used for loading and unloading cattle in the past.

Section 98 of the Canada Transportation Act says no approval from the Canadian Transportation Agency is required if a rail line is built "within the right of way of an existing railway line" or "within 100 (metres) of the centre line of an existing railway line for a distance of no more than (three) km."

Construction on the rail yard project has already begun, with crews leveling the ground adjacent to the main railroad. Feeney said the hope is for the project to be completed by the end of the year.

Kristensen has gone to Alan Dunn, Strathcona County's Ward 6 councillor, and MP Leon Benoit for assistance. Dunn has done what he can, but Benoit's office hasn't returned phone calls, Kristensen said.

He has also contacted Alberta Environment, Transport Canada and Environment Canada, but Kristensen said all have claimed to have no role in the project.

"How is this possible? How can a private company come into our neighborhood and build an industrial rail yard next to our homes and protected natural areas without approvals from anyone, and without contacting us as the people who live next door?" Kristensen said.

"We want to be the best neighbours possible out there," Feeney said, noting the company designed drainage from the property to not impact nearby residences. He said Cando Contracting has also offered to build berms and trees to create a visual barrier.

But for Kristensen, it isn't just about the visual impact to the land.

He said studies claim the diesel from train exhaust is 5.5 times more carcinogenic than automobile diesel fuel.

Not confident the cars will be 100 per cent empty, he also expressed worries about petroleum spills and the general noise that comes from a rail yard when engines and cars are linked. There are also fears about a drop in property value being within a baseball throw of the rail yard.

Kristensen said he's used to trains rumbling past his house since 1978, when he moved there, but "An industrial rail yard is a totally different matter."

"They're not doing anything illegal, but it doesn't make it right," he said.

"We're going to do everything in our power to halt the operation.... Some of us just aren't going to stand for it."

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