

To the Mayor and Council, Town of the Blue Mountains

I wish to express my opposition to the request from Astec for a change to the town's noise bylaw, which prohibits disturbing operational noise outside the hours of 7am to 7pm. Any change, whether a temporary or permanent exemption for one company or a change to the existing bylaw, would permit a situation where an industrial manufacturing plant can make disturbing, intrusive noise until 11pm.

I am aware council has received a number of communications on this issue from my neighbours raising a number of valid concerns, which I share. I want to focus my comments on just a couple of points.

The company claims it has been doing business the same way for 65 years. Clearly, this is not the case. A small factory was opened in 1958, at the edge of town. There were houses here before that, and many of them were weekend homes. Seasonal. Cottages. But we don't live in 1958, or 1978 or 1998.

Today, I live in a growing residential neighbourhood, including full-time residents with families and children. It would be unrecognizable to someone from 65 years ago. As the neighbourhood has grown, so has the factory, which now dwarfs the original building. It is obvious the scale of industrial activity has grown as well. To claim things haven't changed is to pretend you can't see what's obvious to the naked eye.

The company's deputation lists the ways it makes a significant contribution to the local economy. So do I and all my neighbours. We pay taxes, support local business with the purchase of goods and services, do all our shopping here. We volunteer with and donate to local community organizations. We hire builders and other trades to build, renovate and repair our homes. We do all that because we live here.

The impact of the 150 or so homes in my neighbourhood on the local economy is substantial and important.

Last year's decision appears to be consistent with the town's approach over the years, ensuring this company feels welcome in this community. I understand this perspective - but it came at the expense of the residents who live here, and who have the reasonable expectation of the high quality of life here. I believe, when something negatively affects my peaceful enjoyment of my home, I should be able to count on the support of our local elected leadership to address the problem.

Put simply, the circumstances in which Astec operates today are fundamentally different than they were 65 years ago. We need council's help to ensure the company's activities reflect that change.

Over the past year, I have participated in the community committee Astec was required to establish in order to get its exemption to the bylaw. To be honest, it has been a frustrating process for residents, for a number of reasons. It is clear we disagree with regard to the noise bylaw. But I believe company staff on the committee have a sincere interest in improving the relationship with the residents in the neighbourhood.

The problem is, I don't think that is consistent with the behavior of the company over the years. In all the time I've been here, it has always felt like the company treats its residential neighbours essentially as an afterthought. An insistence on doing its work as usual, despite the obvious changes to the neighbourhood around it, reflects that attitude.

In its deputation, Astec states its production process is the same as it's always been. While I suspect technological change has likely had some impact, this point says more about the company's unwillingness to recognize the change that has happened in this neighbourhood.

One of the reasons given for a refusal to adapt to this change is the safety of its employees. I agree the safety of employees performing hazardous work should be any employer's highest priority. We were told just last week that Astec has gone more than 600 days without a reportable accident, which is great. However, it should not be the town's responsibility to change its noise bylaw, or my responsibility to endure disturbing noise on evenings and weekends, so Astec workers are safe. It is Astec's responsibility to ensure safe working conditions for its employees, while respecting the bylaw, which protects the rights of residents to peace and quiet during evenings and weekends.

If the company finds itself in a changed situation at this location, which is clearly the case, then from my perspective it would seem to make more sense for the company to focus on adapting to that changed circumstance.

Over the course of 58 years I've seen the remarkable growth of this neighbourhood. At the same time, I witnessed the growth of this company, and experienced the resulting growth in the scope and scale of noise it generates.

The building has grown exponentially over several decades. At the same time, the residential population has significantly increased in the surrounding neighbourhood. In recent years, the number of full-time residents has increased. It is incongruous that a manufacturing facility of this size exists alongside a growing residential area.

Council is actually facilitating this growth. A recent council decision approved a development which will see 42 residences built directly across the street from the factory. I don't understand how council reconciles approving more residential development in the neighbourhood while allowing an industrial manufacturing facility an exemption from the noise bylaw intended to protect residents.

You have the opportunity today to address that. I'm asking council to recognize the importance of the residents who live in my neighbourhood, and to protect our right to that peaceable enjoyment of our homes.

You have a noise bylaw for a reason. Please direct Astec to abide by it, and to abide by the same rules as everyone else.

Cim Nunn