

Azusa anti-mining referendum could qualify for November ballot

Bethania Palma Markus, Los Angeles Newspaper Group, 8-19-10

AZUSA -- Residents opposed to mining operations in the foothills said they've collected more than enough signatures to put an anti-mining referendum on the November ballot.

Members of the political action group Azusans Against Mining Expansion submitted 2,532 signatures to the city clerk's office, which on Thursday were being verified by the county clerk's office. They needed 1,650 registered voter signatures to qualify the referendum.

Thursday marked the deadline for signatures needed to qualify the referendum for the ballot.

"This has been strictly a grassroots effort," said Paul Naccachian, who spearheads the group. "The public is very aware of what the City Council has done and there's lot of displeasure and anger among the public for the city council's stand by approving the expansion."

The Azusa City Council in July approved an amended mining permit allowing Vulcan Materials Co. to move operations from the east side of its 270-acre Azusa Rock quarry to the west.

If the referendum passes it will nullify the City Council's decision and stop Vulcan from moving forward on the amended plan, according to Azusans Against Mining Expansion.

A representative from Vulcan said the entire region will benefit from the company's reclamation plan, which will include efforts to contour the hillsides to make them look more natural.

"The mined areas will be reclaimed so that the slopes will be restored to the same level as the unmined slopes, and that's going to be a huge benefit to the entire community and region," said Peg Casey, Vulcan spokeswoman. "We will continue to work closely with the city and the community to uphold the decisions of the City Council and protect the benefits provided in the approved mining plan."

City officials have said the referendum process would not necessarily stop Vulcan from mining on the western part of its property.

Instead, it would get rid of the benefits for Azusa negotiated in the agreement, including mining fees and other incentives, according to Azusa's Assistant Economic and Community Development Director Conal McNamara.

Those opposed to the new plan are concerned about environmental impacts, dust and the loss of Van Tassel Ridge, which will be cut down as part of Vulcan's new mining operation.

Anti-mining activists have said they believe the city is using a scare tactic and that because all elements are contingent on each other, a successful referendum would nix the project.

The issue has remained contentious, pitting residents and communities against each other.

Earlier this year the mayor of neighboring Duarte recommended a boycott of Azusa businesses and the city plans to file a lawsuit against Azusa over the issue.