

# Perception, fact-finding has come at a cost in Azusa Rock Quarry battle

**Daniel Tedford, Los Angeles Newspaper Group, 8-31-10**

DUARTE - Officials in Duarte since July 2009 have spent about \$235,000 in city funds to stifle a new mining plan for the Azusa Rock Quarry, according to city documents.

Quarry owner Vulcan Materials Co. for the last year sought permission from Azusa to move its mining operation from the eastern part of its property to 80 acres near the Duarte border.

The effort triggered a campaign by Duarte against the project that included attorneys, mining experts and public relations officials.

Despite the effort by Duarte, the Azusa City Council in July voted 4-1 to allow Vulcan Materials to mine the western part of the quarry.

"I think that is something our residents and our voters will have to make the decision if that money was spent wisely or not," Duarte Councilman John Fasana said. "To this point, most of the council and residents have felt it was justified."

Duarte originally set aside \$700,000 to stop the project.

Now Duarte is armed with \$465,000, which will be used for a lawsuit the city filed against Azusa.

"We wanted to make sure that we were taken seriously," City Manager Darrell George said.

Fasana said he knew it would be expensive to fight Vulcan, but where the city couldn't match Vulcan in funds, it could out match them in message, Fasana said.

"I think Vulcan certainly edges us in terms of resources, but I also think they have a difficult story they are trying to sell," Fasana said. "No matter how you try to sugarcoat it, they are tearing down a side of a hill."

Vulcan officials said they expected a major fight from Duarte from day one.

"Once they announced they had set aside their war chest to fight this project, we were clear they would be spending it," spokeswoman Peg Casey said.

Of the \$235,000, Duarte paid about \$12,000 to public relations consultant Mary Barrow.

Another \$22,000 went to the firm Englander, Knabe and Allen, which includes 30-year public relations veteran Harvey Englander, and Matt Knabe, the son of county Supervisor Don Knabe.

That group has been charged with preparing flyers, making phone calls and preparing messages to the community, George said.

For Duarte, it has been an opportunity to tell its side of the story and educate residents.

Vulcan officials said Duarte's campaign was political campaign rather than an educational.

"There has been an extraordinary amount of misinformation that has come out about this project from the opposition," Casey said. "It is very troubling."

Duarte also hired technical consultants to evaluate certain geological aspects of the project, including potential landslides, liquefaction and how much material was available on the mining site - all of which conflicted with Azusa's consultant.

Duarte paid A.G.I. Geotechnical, Inc. about \$18,000 for its work.

But that bill pales in comparison to the money spent on the project's environmental impact report.

Lilburn and Associates were contracted by Azusa for the preparation of the environmental document analyzing Vulcan's project. Azusa paid \$613,000 for the report, but Vulcan will reimburse the cost, city officials said.

Vulcan didn't release specific information regarding money spent promoting the Azusa Rock Quarry project.

Vulcan used public relations firm Curt Pringle and Associates' to pitch their project.

The firm's Vice President Todd Priest functioned as the spokesperson until the permit was approved by the council.

Priest and his team are still working for Vulcan, but Priest is no longer functioning as the project's spokesman.

As a condition of approving the project, Vulcan will now cover the legal fees for Azusa to defend the project against a lawsuit filed by Duarte.

Those fees will eventually be determined based on the length and breadth of the legal battle.