

Roblar Road quarry northwest of Petaluma gets final OK

Brett Wilkison, Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 12-15-10

A divided Sonoma County Board of Supervisors gave final approval today to the Roblar Road rock quarry west of Cotati as well as the rock project's habitat proposal involving county protected farmland.

Slated for 70 acres north of Two Rock Valley, the quarry proposed by former North Bay Construction owner John Barella is the first of two controversial projects before the board today.

A final vote on the Dutra asphalt plant, south of Petaluma along the Petaluma River, is set for this afternoon.

Supervisors Mike Kerns, Paul Kelley and Valerie Brown voted for the quarry and the habitat proposal. Supervisors Shirlee Zane and Efren Carrillo voted against the quarry and the mitigation deal, citing their concerns about the quarry's potential impacts on the environment and implications for county open space policy from the habitat deal.

The vote came in the morning consent agenda, a slot in which supervisors normally vote on procedural or routine items with little or no deliberation.

The decision followed an October 19 public hearing that featured several hours of public testimony on the quarry and a preliminary vote backing the rock project.

A separate hearing and straw vote backing the quarry's habitat proposal was held last week. That plan calls for using 105 acres of adjacent, county-protected private ranchland to replace rare amphibian habitat that will be lost to the rock project.

Opponents again voiced their opinions on the quarry and the habitat deal in public testimony allowed as a part of the consent agenda.

They called for the board to postpone its decision to allow further study of the quarry's potential impacts on ground water. The project is adjacent to a former unlined, uncapped county landfill and opponents fear blasting and digging in the area could release toxins from the landfill.

Barella has said safeguards will prevent such problems from occurring.

"A vote on this is premature," quarry critic Ann Maurice of the Ad Hoc Committee for Clean Water told supervisors, citing lingering questions she said state water and wildlife regulators have about the project.

A group of neighbors opposed to the project, Citizens Against Roblar Road Quarry, have vowed a legal challenge over the quarry's approval.

Barella received congratulatory handshakes from supporters after the hearing. He declined an interview request.

His attorney Steve Butler praised the board's final decision.

"We'll just wait and see what happens and react when and if any (legal) action is taken," Butler said about potential litigation from quarry opponents.

The decision came in the first part of supervisors last meeting of 2010. It was delayed for more than an hour by board farewells to retiring supervisors Kelley and Kerns, as well as three county officials who'll be departing at the end of the year: Sheriff Bill Cogbill and County Counsel Steven Woodside, both of whom are retiring, and outgoing District Attorney Stephan Passalacqua.