

Group wants to put Azusa Rock Quarry mining plan on the ballot

Daniel Tedford, Los Angeles Newspaper Group, 7-16-10

AZUSA -- An anti-mining group is gearing up to make a final stand to stop a new mining permit for the Azusa Rock Quarry, organizers said.

The Azusa City Council on Monday scheduled to approve a second reading of their decision to allow mining on 80 acres west of Fish Canyon owned by Vulcan Materials Co. If the council approves the plan, opponents would have 30 days to collect enough signatures to take the decision to the ballot.

Members of Azusa-based Save Our Canyon said they will start a referendum process.

"We still don't think the plan is good enough," member Richard Deem said. "We gave them a list of eight items that would have made it acceptable to us, and they basically ignored us."

A referendum to put the mining issue on a ballot would need 1,500 signatures from resident voters in Azusa within 30 days of tonight's council meeting. Deem said his group plans to get 2,000 signatures.

Vulcan has a permit from Azusa to mine 190 acres of its 270-acre property near Fish Canyon. With the council's recent decision, Vulcan will not mine 80 acres on the eastern part of its property. Instead, it will mine 80 acres on the western part of its property that was previously not part of its mining permit.

That mining would cut down Van Tassel Ridge but would spare Fish Ridge, which was part of the mining area in the previous mining plan.

In addition, new environmental benefits are included in the plan as well as additional tax dollars for the city.

The council two weeks ago voted 4-1 to approve the plan, with Councilman Joe Rocha dissenting.

An official representing Vulcan said the company crafted a plan that would be better for Azusa than the previous permit.

"While a few political opportunists may be looking for personal gain, clearly the community has seen the benefits this plan provides," Vulcan spokesman Todd Priest said. "The Azusa City Council nearly unanimously voted to approve the plan. Their approval guarantees the visual improvements and stops the expansion of mining, both of which are priorities for the community."

Deem said his group believes the plan is an expansion of mining, saying that Vulcan disturbed much of the 80 acres on the east.

He also said documents related to the plan had contradictions.

An approved referendum could go on a ballot for a special election in December or January, Deem said.

If not, the item could be included on the ballot for the City Council election in March, Deem said.

Rocha said a referendum is the right of the people.

"I think the beauty of our government is that it allows those who are not in agreement with what was passed to do a referendum," Rocha said. "I know there were many people who were not in agreement with the decision that was made. Time will tell."

Attempts to reach councilmen who voted in favor of the plan were unsuccessful.

Deem said he expects voters to turn down the plan.

If so, that vote would kill it for a year before Vulcan could resubmit it or propose a new plan, Deem said.

"The signature gathering is the hardest part," Deem said. "I don't think the campaign will be difficult. The plan is so flawed, it is not a problem, I don't think."

If voters approve Vulcan's proposal, that could spell the end to any opposition, he said.

"I think at that point we would be done," Deem said.

Deem and Save Our Canyon will have to wait until tonight's second reading in order to get the ordinance number for the referendum process.

The number wasn't originally on the initial agenda item voted on two weeks ago, an omission Deem believes was illegal.

Officials with the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office Division of Public Integrity said they have received a complaint on the item and will investigate. Results of an investigation take 30 to 60 days, officials said.