

Never-ending Vulcan spat

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It ain't over till it's over, goes the common wisdom in sports and politics. And sometimes the common wisdom is very wise indeed.

Such is certainly the case so far as mining the San Gabriel Mountains goes after a split decision by the Azusa City Council this week. On a 3-2 vote, the council did turn down the property owner's application to mine a different, far-westerly portion of its Fish Canyon rock quarry. But a different 3-2 council majority also approved an Environmental Impact Report prepared by Vulcan Materials Co. Under some interpretations of what comes next, that approval would allow Vulcan to eventually go ahead and switch mining locations on its property as it has sought to do for some time now in an extended and expensive political fight.

So, no, it's not over - and sometimes it seems as if it may never be - for Azusa, for Vulcan and for the citizens and City Council of Duarte, who have sought to block the mining of a new area much closer to their city than it is to anyone living in Azusa.

Certainly all parties concerned had hoped for a clearer resolution than this. Millions of dollars and thousands of hours have been spent in the various efforts to support the proposed Vulcan move and to fight it. And to explain what on Earth is going on here, for that matter, on this newspaper's part. To have it all end in another cloud of dust is frustrating in the extreme.

Yet that is what has happened. It's not the Duarte City Council that has rejected any immediate implementation of Vulcan's move toward mining above a Duarte neighborhood - it's the Azusa City Council, which, in good economic times, when there is a strong demand for rock for construction work, stands to make a lot of money in fees generated by Vulcan.

It seems that, for Azusa Mayor Joe Rocha and Councilmen Robert Gonzales and Uriel Macias, at least, Vulcan, for all its public relations and outreach efforts, simply has never been convincing enough about the real reasons for wanting to move its operations within its property.

Yes, it is its property, and with ownership comes many rights. But mining so close to the homes and businesses of a vast megalopolis affects lots of people, people with real concerns. These are the ways the gears of democracy grind - slowly, and sometimes getting grit into the mechanism along the way. Mayor Rocha and his colleagues think that Vulcan really wants to move mining to the west because it can get more, and more lucrative, rock from that location - though Vulcan has never said that's the reason for the proposed move. If it is part of the reason, we see no reason for not saying so. We also believe that if the micro-benching process Vulcan says it will do only if it gets its wish to move is so good for the future of the mountains-restoration process, then it ought to be done in any case.

And we look forward to the day this long and grueling mining spat truly is over.