

Azusa rejects plan to let company shift mining to area that borders Duarte

Opponents say the rock quarry would scar a mountainside, affect air quality and cut off access to a popular trailhead.

Corina Knoll, Los Angeles Times, 5-19-10

Azusa city leaders have rejected a rock mining company's plan to dig into a hillside above the San Gabriel Valley, a plan that residents in neighboring Duarte said would have scarred the mountainside, affected air quality and cut off access to a popular trailhead.

After a six-hour meeting that ended Tuesday morning, the Azusa City Council voted 3 to 2 against the mining proposal.

Vulcan Materials submitted a request last year to shift its operations from Fish Canyon to an area that borders Duarte. Vulcan had originally planned to mine an eastern section of its 270 acres, but said the land near Duarte is less visible, which is in keeping with Azusa's general plan.

Environmental reports showed that the rock quarry would have no major effect on Duarte aside from aesthetics, but hundreds of Duarte residents flooded Azusa city meetings to voice their disapproval.

Azusa Mayor Joe Rocha said the presence of Duarte residents did not influence his decision to vote against the proposal.

"I questioned from the beginning the success of the revegetation plan," Rocha said, referring to Vulcan's promise of concurrent reclamation of the hillsides.

The company planned to use a technique called micro-benching, leaving pyramid steps about 1 to 2 feet high and 1 to 2 feet deep. Rocha said he was wary of a revegetation plan that offered a 40% success rate.

Vulcan spokesman Todd Priest said Azusa failed to understand that although the vertical surface wouldn't see new growth, "90% of the benchtops would be revegetated and virtually eliminate the appearance of a previously mined area."

Priest would not say if Vulcan, which has a permit to mine Fish Canyon until 2038, planned to file a lawsuit.

Duarte Mayor Margaret Finlay, who once raised the possibility of boycotting Azusa businesses if the proposal passed, called Azusa's decision a symbol of neighbors working together.

If litigation is pursued, Finlay said Duarte would offer its support.

"We will hold hands with Azusa, and we will fight this battle together," she said.