

New gravel pit approved along Russian River

Mining site just north of Ukiah is near proposed shopping and housing development

Glenda Anderson, Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 5-21-10

The Mendocino County Planning Commission on Thursday approved a new pit gravel mining operation along the Russian River just north of Ukiah, a decision that doesn't sit well with the corporation that owns the land next door.

Granite Construction Company's gravel pit would be located just north of 47 acres owned by Masonite Corporation and more than 100 acres Masonite formerly owned but sold to developers for shopping and housing projects.

Masonite representatives said the gravel mining operation could potentially kill future development.

"The lands to the south of this proposed project are not vacant. They are in various stages of the development process and have active potable water wells that are threatened by use changes proposed by this project," said Santa Rosa attorney Tim Smith, who represents Masonite Corporation.

Any development on the land would need a proven water supply before it could proceed, because the water agency representing the area is under a water moratorium.

Masonite also voiced concern about using fertile land for a gravel mine and about deep holes in the ground that would be left behind. Masonite engineering consultant Paul Wisniewski said the holes will be a "cavernous" 65 feet deep.

A representative from Developers Diversified Realty, which has proposed a controversial 80-acre shopping and housing development on former Masonite property, attended Thursday's meeting but declined to be interviewed.

Developers Diversified's project has been on hold since November, when voters turned down a company-backed ballot measure seeking to bypass the usual planning process.

Smith would not elaborate on Masonite's development plans. It once operated a wood products plant on the property that has since been dismantled.

Planning Commissioners voiced concern over the project's impacts on traffic but said that they believe potential problems caused by Granite's operations could be mitigated and that it would benefit the county. The pits someday could be used as ponds, some suggested.

"I'm glad to see Granite is bringing in jobs. I see no reason why we wouldn't be supporting it," said Commissioner Marilyn Ogle.

The proposed sand and gravel mining operation is on 65 acres located roughly one mile north of Ukiah at North State Street and Kunzler Ranch Road.

Granite Construction plans to extract between 100,000 tons and 250,000 tons per year, depending on market

demand.

Smith said he does not yet know whether Masonite will appeal the Planning Commission's decision.