

# Campaign contributions in Azusa give insight into who is fighting in mining battle

**Daniel Tedford, Los Angeles Newspaper Group, 11-12-10**

AZUSA - A group bent on turning back a new mining plan is hoping its \$5,000 in campaign contributions will be enough to overcome \$239,000 spent by a mining company to promote the project.

Campaign finance statements reported to Azusa in October shed light on money being spent in the fight over a plan by Vulcan Materials Co. to mine the western part of the Azusa Rock Quarry.

Two groups are now battling head-to-head in an effort to either pass or reject a development agreement tied to the plan.

The Canyon City Alliance - a group composed of Vulcan Materials, the Azusa Police Officers Association, and the local Chamber of Commerce - is fighting to promote the plan by asking residents to vote yes on Measure A in the city's upcoming special election on Jan. 25.

"Our commitment is to passing measure A," said Elizabeth Ramirez, executive director of the Canyon City Alliance. "The Canyon City Alliance will continue to invest the resources we need to make sure we restore our hillsides."

Azusans Against Mining Expansion - who members brought the referendum to a ballot through a recent petition - are fighting for voters to reject Measure A.

"They have Vulcan behind them," Azusans Against Mining Expansion leader Jeri Vogel said. "We expected they have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars. That is what we expected. We just have people who are backing us and have the solid belief in Azusa this is a bad deal."

The Azusa City Council in July approved an amended mining permit allowing Vulcan Materials Co. to move mining operations at its 270-acre Azusa Rock Quarry.

Vulcan has a permit from Azusa to mine 190 acres of its property near Fish Canyon. With the council's approval, Vulcan will be able to mine 80 acres on the western part of its property instead of 80 acres on the east.

The eastern end moves the project closer to Duarte and removes a ridge - Van Tassel - normally visible to Duarte residents.

In addition, the new plan includes a more technologically advanced way of reshaping mined hillsides, according to the plan's proponents.

By striking down the project's development agreement, opponents of the plan hope it will also nullify the plan's use permit.

City officials disagree, arguing only the development agreement - carrying financial benefits of the plan - is all that will be affected.

If the plan's opponents are right and the plan falls with the development agreement, Vulcan would still be allowed to operate under its previous use permit to mine the eastern end.

In the effort to fight the mining plan, Azusans Against Mining Expansion raised \$2,759 in reportable funds between July and September, more than half of which came from Duarte residents who gave \$100 or more, according to documents.

Some of those who gave include Duarte Councilwoman Lois Gaston and Duarte public relations consultant Mary Barrow.

Duarte has filed a lawsuit against Azusa in an effort to strike down the mining plan.

The remainder of the donations - \$1,209 - came in donations of less than \$100 that are not itemized, according to documents.

Vogel said much of that money came from Azusa residents.

"The citizens of Azusa who are backing us are not as well off as the citizens of Duarte who are able to write those checks," Vogel said. "They give what they can. We are good with it."

The campaign documents show for the first time the amount of money being spent by Vulcan Materials promoting its project.

All of the Canyon City Alliance's reportable funds were non-monetary contributions provided by Vulcan Materials, according to documents.

Vulcan paid Curt Pringle and Associates - the firm that employs former Vulcan spokesman Todd Priest - for fair market value of services totaling \$19,462.

Casey Communications - the company of current Vulcan spokeswoman Peg Casey - was listed for a total of \$25,000.

And consulting and mailers from Shallman Communications cost a total of \$141,776 in assessed fair market value.

"We have a large resource group, support group and network, and we are working together," Ramirez said.

Vogel said it will be difficult to compete with a major corporation like Vulcan, but citizens' grassroots effort should be enough.

"They are trying to buy the election and we are just going to have to be on top of it," she said. "We have enough to get us to do what we need to do. If we need to do a fundraiser, we will do more."

If voting down the development agreement is successful but the outcome doesn't affect the mining plan's use permit, Azusans Against Mining Expansion may be forced to challenge it in court.

If that happens, Vogel said the group would be forced to raise more money to pay for legal fees.