

# Supervisors face delicate decision on quarry's future

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Finding a balance for the future of the San Rafael Rock Quarry has proven to be a difficult task.

The contentious debate at Tuesday night's Board of Supervisors hearing demonstrated the arduous nature of finding a middle ground between neighbors, who are tired of the noise, dust and traffic the quarry generates, and the quarry's owners and its local backers, who say it is an important economic resource that provides jobs and business, not to mention rocks for construction and road work.

Both sides are justified in their opinions.

The county has spent years devoting time and money to debates, lawsuits and numerous studies to the future of the basalt quarry at the end of Point San Pedro Road. Those efforts have led to a staff proposal that attempts to let the quarry operate for 15 more years, but under conditions designed to address neighbors' complaints.

The quarry became a throbbing headache for neighbors as it ramped up its business. The quarry's previous owner had talked about ending operations in the late 1990s, but other quarries around the Bay Area were closing, sending more business to San Rafael.

County oversight of the quarry also was inexcusably lax. Neighbors complained about their homes being rocked by blasting, the danger and nuisance of dust kicked up by the quarry and big trucks rumbling up and down Point San Pedro Road. A county grand jury report uncovered numerous buildings constructed without county permits.

Those problems make it more difficult to allow an industrial business to continue to operate so close to nearby homes.

Dutra says it has spent \$11 million in improvements to the quarry to respond to complaints. The family-owned company also has cleaned up its permit problems.

But even though the quarry was there long before neighbors moved in, many residents say the time for neighborly coexistence has run out.

Dutra told supervisors on Tuesday that it could live with the 173 conditions proposed by county staff, but that its business cannot afford further reductions in operations.

County supervisors find themselves between a rock and a hard place. They must comply with a 2004 Marin Superior Court ruling that defended the quarry's right to operate, but that ruling also called on the county to update operating rules to respond to complaints.

Conditions proposed by county staff include limiting truck trips and restricting operating hours. Another condition requires Dutra to pay for county staff to ensure it is complying with the rules.

Some neighbors are complaining that the conditions would allow the quarry to continue its barge-loading operations as late as 10 p.m.

Supervisors should respond to their complaints and indicate exactly why the night-time hours are important to the quarry. That's all part of the political skill needed to find a workable compromise.

That's what the supervisors should keep in mind as they prepare for the next hearing on Sept. 28.