

Temecula annexation back before panel

Jeff Horseman, Riverside Press-Enterprise, 9-21-10

A Newport Beach real estate investor will get a chance Thursday to ask a boundary-setting panel to reverse its decision to let Temecula annex roughly 4,500 acres southwest of the city.

Nelson Mamey owns about 40 acres in the area to be annexed. The Riverside Local Agency Formation Commission in June granted the city's request to incorporate the land into its boundaries.

The reconsideration hearing is on the agenda for Thursday's commission meeting.

The hill-covered, rocky land is mostly undeveloped. Nearly all the area is taken up by the Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve, a wilderness research expanse managed by San Diego State University.

The annexation has been contentious because Liberty Quarry, a 414-acre mining operation, is proposed on a site near the land the city will control. City leaders strongly oppose the quarry, fearing it will ruin the region's quality of life.

The commission last year rejected the city's bid to annex the quarry site as part of a nearly 5,000-acre annexation. The city would have banned open-pit mining on the quarry property.

The city amended its request, leaving out the quarry, and eventually won the commission's approval. City officials have said their annexation is needed to fulfill a long-term city goal of preserving the area as open space.

In a letter to the commission, Mamey said the city misled the commission into thinking there were no plans to create a park or other amenities in the annexed area.

He referred to comments made at a July City Council meeting, specifically by Councilman Mike Naggar, who spoke of plans to put trails and park rangers in the newly annexed land.

"... the future desire to put a quarry there will become even more incompatible by virtue of us using that land and that area," Naggar said at the time.

Mamey said the commission needs to hear that.

"This is new information that could not have previously been presented to (the commission), and it clearly warrants reconsideration," he wrote. He added that annexation will make it harder to develop his land.

Commission member Phil Williams also questioned the council's comments. "That's totally different from what they presented to the commission," he said in July.

In a letter to the commission, City Attorney Peter Thorson wrote that Mamey's arguments do not meet the criteria for the commission to reconsider its decision.

"The comments of one or two council members is not sufficient" to change zoning rules, he wrote, adding that Mamey wants the commission to "violate its statutory obligations" by directly regulating land uses in the annexed area.

Some city officials and quarry opponents have expressed frustration with the commission, especially over a condition attached to the annexation that requires Temecula to remove the quarry site from its sphere of influence. The sphere marks areas that could one day be annexed by a city.