

Residents worry about plans for old quarry

Nathan Scharn, San Diego Union-Tribune, 2-1-11

CARLSBAD — Though construction is years away, residents have already begun to express concern about what sort of development would be built on an old rock quarry visible from state Route 78.

The Planning Commission recently approved a measure to fix up the site so that it could be used for future development. Though the commission's move last month merely granted permits to refresh the old mine land, some neighbors were wondering about the land's future.

The old mine, South Coast Quarry, is south of state Route 78 and west of College Boulevard, with 100 acres in Carlsbad and 4 in Oceanside.

Corky McMillin Companies submitted a master plan in September for a development that called for 656 housing units on the 100 acres in Carlsbad, as well as nearby land, said Carlsbad City Planner Van Lynch. Hanson Aggregates owns the quarry.

Any building is years away, Lynch said, and a specific time frame could not be determined because the site has yet to even been transformed from its state as an exhausted quarry, where tarps now cover mounds of dirt, and piles of rocks are scattered about.

Neighbors spoke at the Planning Commission meeting to share their worry about the possibility of dense residential development.

"I'm pleased to see some reclamation of the area," said Thomas Gibbs, who lives nearby in Carlsbad. "Clearly a high-density area will have some concerns."

He worried about the prospect of roads connecting to his neighborhood, which he said is typically isolated.

"No one comes into our area unless you live there," he said. "We love our community and we want to do everything we could possibly do to protect it."

The master plan for the development would likely include apartments or condos and single family homes, Lynch said.

The Planning Commission granted the permits and approved the environmental studies to move forward with making the land usable.

"It's a good step as a reclamation plan. It is not a development," said Commissioner Stephen "Hap" L'Heureux. "Even if nothing is ever done to it, it's stable, it's vegetated, it is protected, and then we can go from there. Whether or not we build houses or whether we have open space or whether we build industrial ... that's a conversation we'll have probably for several years within the community."

Hanson Aggregates, the quarry's owner, was represented at the meeting by planning consultant Ann Gunter.

"From the mining company's perspective, they're looking at removing any barriers to use, and to try to develop the site in a way that it doesn't preclude the options for the cities — Carlsbad for their piece, Oceanside for their piece — to make those future land use decisions," Gunter said.

The company still needs to acquire permits from other agencies, but hopes to do so and begin work this year, Gunter said.

The quarry pulled rocks from the earth from 1961 to 1995, contributing granite for roads and boulders for jetties throughout North County.

State law requires that old mine sites are restored to a usable state.

Plans call for grading parts of the property into flat pads that can be built on, removing nonnative plants and widening Buena Vista Creek, which flows through the old quarry.

Oceanside is responsible for overseeing environmental review of the project.