

Area for possible Temecula annexations to exclude quarry

Jeff Horseman, Riverside Press-Enterprise, 1-22-11

"Anti-climactic" is usually not the way to describe anything involving the proposed Liberty Quarry.

But the term could apply to a Thursday public hearing in which a boundary-setting panel is expected to remove part of the quarry site from Temecula's sphere of influence, which marks areas that could one day become a part of the city.

The Riverside Local Agency Formation Commission will consider whether to remove about 180 acres of undeveloped land from the sphere. Roughly 149 acres of the land is slated to be part of Liberty Quarry, according to developer Granite Construction.

The 9:30 a.m. hearing is in the Board of Supervisors hearing room on the 1st floor of the County Administrative Center, 4080 Lemon St. in Riverside.

Granite wants to build the quarry on 414 acres between Temecula and the San Diego County line. Opponents say the quarry will harm the public with air pollution and ruin the environment. Granite says quarry critics are misleading and the open-pit mine will be a local asset.

Temecula originally sought to annex nearly 5,000 acres that included the quarry site. If successful, the city would have enacting zoning to bar open-pit mining on the quarry property.

But the commission, which reviews proposed annexations, denied the city's request in 2009, saying the quarry was a regional issue best decided at the county level. The city revised its request to exclude the quarry site.

The seven-member commission, which includes two Riverside County supervisors, local elected leaders and a private citizen, voted last summer to approve the second request. As a condition of approval, the commission required the city to apply to remove the quarry from its sphere.

The sphere change was denounced by some quarry critics, who thought the commission's request could make it harder for Temecula to fight the quarry. Several City Council members also criticized the decision and the commission's treatment of the city.

In the end, the city applied to revise its sphere. "From what I see, both sides accept what (the commission) wanted," Temecula Mayor Ron Roberts said.

Granite also supports the re-drawn sphere. A letter to the commission from Granite Aggregate Resource Development Manager Gary Johnson endorsed the change and suggested minor changes to the city's request.

Temecula resident Fred Bartz, who is one of the most vocal quarry opponents, said he's not aware of anyone who will challenge the new sphere. He said the proposed change is not as important now that the county Planning Commission is set to hear the quarry proposal in late April and early May.