

Quarry Approval Could Impact Oakdale

Richard Paloma, Oakdale Leader, 3-2-11

An item with potential adverse effects for Oakdale residents, the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors plans to hold a hearing regarding the recommendation to establish a rock quarry located in southwest Tuolumne County, adjacent to Stanislaus County, off Cooperstown Road.

The proposed quarry's 135-acre site is at the Stanislaus County line. Access to the quarry is from Cooperstown Road in Stanislaus County.

Jack and Tricia Gardella and The Resource Exploration and Drilling Company had their application heard before the Tuolumne County Planning Commission at the Feb. 2 and Feb. 16 meetings and, despite many individuals present in opposition, the commission voted to send the project to the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors for approval.

Bonnie Fogarty of Oakdale was one of the persons present at the Tuolumne meeting. Fogarty owns a cattle ranch adjacent to the site. She's concerned about the noise, pollution, and water quality that she believes are going to be affected by the quarry's operation.

"It's a large industrial project in the middle of agricultural land," Fogarty said. "It's a project that originally would not qualify under the Williamson Act."

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965 – commonly referred to as the Williamson Act – allows local governments to enter into contracts with private landowners for the purpose of restricting specific parcels of land to agricultural or open space use and to not be [developed](#) or converted to another use.

Because the application has been reconfigured to include "concurrent reclamation," Tuolumne County has deemed mining to now be a permitted use of the land.

The quarry proposal states that the Sierra Railroad will carry the mined crushed rock from the Cooperstown mine site through Oakdale to Riverbank where it will be transferred.

Fogarty has concerns about the increased rail traffic and its potential effect on the residents of Oakdale.

"The plan calls for crushed rock, via trains that will average 60 cars in length, to make 20 round trips a week. That's more than 40 times through our city every month for the next 75 years," Fogarty said. "I see potential traffic delays throughout our city, issues regarding emergency vehicles being delayed by blocked train crossings, plus increased noise a train that size will generate."

Fogarty pointed out that the trains will pass Sierra View Elementary School, Oakdale High School, Oak Valley Hospital and the Vineyard and Bridle Ridge residential developments. The plan does not state what time of day the trains will be moving through Oakdale.

Oakdale City Councilman Michael Brennan also attended the Feb. 2, 2011 Tuolumne County Planning Commission Meeting after he was contacted by Fogarty.

“I wouldn’t want my ranch impacted like that or have planned on having a retirement home out there,” Brennan said. “As an elected city official my concern, however, is the project’s effect to Oakdale and the residents.”

Brennan said at the planning meeting he voiced his opposition to the quarry requesting that a proper environmental report be made as well as raising concerns about the impact to Oakdale traffic by increased rail usage and potential delays to traffic with the plan.

“As far as I know, we (city council) didn’t have any prior notification about this project,” Brennan said. “This project definitely impacts Oakdale and we should have been included in discussions.”

Oakdale Mayor Pat Paul said she had the same concern about lack of notice to Oakdale regarding the project and plans on following up on the matter with the Tuolumne Board of Supervisors. She’s asked Riverbank Mayor Virginia Madueno to join her.

Oakdale City Manager Steve Hallam noted that city officials and staff needed to get involved with the Tuolumne County Supervisors meeting next month.

“The public interest threshold is there,” Hallam said. “People are coming to our meetings to speak about it.”

Brennan said he was concerned that only a Negative Declaration would be made by the county about the project and prefers a more in-depth Environmental Impact Report. He feels a Negative Declaration is just a checklist and can be manipulated so a project can be pushed through the process.

“I’m not accusing Tuolumne County of doing anything like that, but I am concerned something like that can happen,” Brennan said. “This is a big project and they should make sure preparation is done right.”

The planning commission determined that after the Negative Declaration, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts to the environment and forwarded it to the county Board of Supervisors.

Brennan said that since learning of the possibility for increased rail transports, he’s been in contact with Oakdale Fire Chief Mike Botto since the Yosemite crossing is a main Sierra Railway thoroughfare.

“They (public safety) prefer going directly through to an emergency rather than around a crossing,” Brennan said. “There are alternate routes, but they would not be time efficient in an emergency.”

A meeting on the matter is scheduled for Wednesday, March 16 at 1:30 p.m. in Sonora.