

Temecula report blasts Liberty Quarry study

Jeff Horseman, Riverside Press-Enterprise, 3-8-11

A massive environmental study of the proposed Liberty Quarry is "fundamentally misleading," "incomplete" and "altogether ignores or omits negative impacts," a Temecula city report states.

The report by Assistant Planner Betsy Lowrey accompanies the agenda for the City Council meeting that starts at 7 p.m. today in City Hall, 41000 Main St. The council is expected to pass a resolution formalizing Temecula's opposition to the quarry sought for a 414-acre site south of the city limits.

Council members have individually opposed the quarry. The resolution would be their first official statement on the project, which is under Riverside County's jurisdiction and the subject of county Planning Commission hearings on April 26 and May 3 at Temecula's Rancho Community Church.

In an e-mail, Karie Reuther, a spokeswoman for quarry developer Granite Construction, wrote: "We are disappointed that the city would consider a resolution that is not supported by the facts. (The environmental study) shows the city residents will not be impacted by the operation of Liberty Quarry.

"There is also overwhelming evidence showing there are large economic and environmental benefits to the city and the region if Liberty Quarry is developed."

Completed in 2009, the 6,800-page draft environmental impact report was written by an outside consultant paid by Granite. County planners vetted the study and circulated a draft for public review.

The study concluded the open-pit mine would have "significant and unavoidable" effects on air quality and traffic, but there would be air pollution and truck traffic if the quarry was never built, because trucks would continue to travel long distances to transport materials it would produce.

Granite views the study as proof its project would be a good neighbor. Granite executive Gary Johnson downplayed "significant and unavoidable" as technical terms and said the quarry will improve air quality and traffic by taking diesel trucks off the roads.

Quarry critics argue the project will produce dust particles harmful to nearby residents' health. They say it will cause more truck traffic and damage a nearby ecological reserve.

The two-page city staff report argues that the county's own land-use policies preclude the development of the quarry, even a smaller version, at the proposed site. It is in "an incompatible and categorically inappropriate location," the report said.

As for the environmental study, the city report concludes it "fails to mitigate the adverse impacts of the project" and "provides errors or miscalculations that deceive the reader as to the magnitude of the project's true negative impacts."

Information in the study "appears to be advocacy for the project rather than valid independent environmental analysis," the report said.

County spokesman Ray Smith said a response to the city's earlier comments will be in the study's final draft.