

# Councilman pushing for changes to quarry hearing format

*Naggar worried about people being forced to sit through epic hearing(s)*

**Aaron Claverie, Temecula Californian, 3-30-11**

Temecula city officials have said they hope thousands of people turn out for the upcoming county hearing on Granite Construction's Liberty Quarry project to speak out against the proposed mine.

But Councilman Mike Naggar said it would be cruel to force the large crowd ---- the county has scheduled at least two hearings because of the intense local interest in the project ---- to listen to hours of "eye-bleeding" details before getting a chance to speak.

His idea, which he floated at a recent City Council meeting is for the Riverside County Planning Commission to conduct two hearings: one for technical reports and the miscellaneous details included in the thousands of pages that make up the environmental review of the project, and another that would be devoted to public comments.

"The way it's set up now," he said Wednesday during a phone interview, "your average citizen ---- Grandma, student or teacher ---- is not going to be able to sit through six hours of staff reports in order to talk for three minutes."

And he said there's a chance that people might end up waiting all that time and still not be allowed to speak because of time constraints.

"It's not conducive to encouraging citizen participation," he said, adding that he's asked city staff members to discuss his plan with county officials, but that he hasn't yet heard whether it's being considered.

Granite, a Northern California-based company, has proposed operating an open-pit mine on 400 acres of Riverside County land between the San Diego County line and Temecula's southern border. Once it's running at full capacity, the 135-acre quarry is expected to generate 5 million tons of aggregate per year at the site, which is just east of the Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve.

On April 26, the county commission will conduct the first of two scheduled hearings on the project ---- a flashpoint for controversy in Southwest County as well as Fallbrook and Rainbow, because of concerns that include the negative effects it could have on air quality, traffic, and the migratory paths of animals.

The quarry is supported by people who point to the high-paying jobs it will produce and the tax revenue it will generate. Supporters also note that the county's Planning Department has said digging a quarry on land next to Interstate 15 on the southern edge of the Riverside County will remove exhaust-spewing big rigs from the stretch of Interstate 15 that runs through the Temecula/Murrieta corridor.

The April 26 hearing, and any subsequent hearings, will be conducted at Rancho Community Church in Temecula because of the large crowd expected and its proximity to the proposed mine site. The church seats 1,200 people, and there might be space for overflow seating if the seating arrangement meets fire department muster, said Temecula Councilwoman Maryann Edwards, who helped secure the venue.

County spokesman Ray Smith, after discussing the tentative hearing format that was sketched out by planning department staff members, said the plan, right now, is for the five-member commission to hear a presentation from staff members on the project at the start of the hearing.

The hearing has been scheduled to start at 4 p.m. at the church, 31300 Rancho Community Way, to give people who work a chance to attend.

That presentation might run about 45 minutes, Smith said. Then Granite will make a presentation. After questions from the commissioners and responses by either staff members or Granite, Smith said, the plan is to take a dinner break around 6 p.m.

After the break, the commission will reconvene, and at some point, start taking public comments, Smith said, adding that the plan is still tentative as of this week.

"We won't know exactly how things are going to unfold until after the meeting begins," he said.

As for how long the county plans to allow for public comments that first night, Smith said commissioners will make that decision.

"It's important to give people the opportunity to speak," he said.

And if that means adding a third meeting?

"We have two set up now; if that becomes an issue, we'll address that," he said.

The second meeting is scheduled for 4 p.m. May 3.

Granite spokeswoman Karie Reuther said in a statement that the company trusts that the county will conduct the hearing in a manner that will allow everyone a chance to both speak and hear the testimony.

At a 2009 county hearing held in Riverside to consider the city of Temecula's request to annex the potential quarry site, hundreds of residents drove north to watch the proceedings and make public comments.

Because of space constraints at the County Administrative Center, some of those who had made the trip were unable to find seats. They drove back home without participating in what ended up being a 10-hour meeting that was capped by the Local Agency Formation Commission voting to reject the city's annexation attempt.

The city later filed a fresh application to annex 4,500 acres of land on its southern borders, a swath dominated by the ecological reserve and excluding the land for the quarry, and that bid was approved.

The city's borders now abut the proposed quarry site on the north and the west. The southern border of the quarry site is the Riverside County border with San Diego County, and the eastern boundary is Interstate 15.