

Whittier council poses many questions about oil-drilling project

Mike Sprague, Los Angeles Newspaper Group, 11-10-11

WHITTIER -- City Council members peppered city staff, an environmental consultant and Matrix Oil Co. officials with their questions about the oil-drilling proposal.

The questioning began late Tuesday night and continued into Wednesday's hearing. Public testimony - beginning with a presentation from the anti-drilling Open Space Legal Defense Fund - began once the council's questions were completed.

About 100 people were at Wednesday's City Council meeting.

Hearings also are scheduled for 6:30p.m. Monday and 5:30 p.m. Tuesday - all at the Radisson Hotel Whittier, 7320 Greenleaf Ave.

"I want to make sure we get all of the people who want to be heard, but I also want to make sure I have my questions answered," Councilman Joe Vinatieri said Tuesday.

"You can see they're pretty detailed in nature," he said. "We've got a very detailed report on a major project here."

But on Wednesday he decided to wait to get more of his questions answered until after the public had its say.

It was Vinatieri who asked most of the questions Tuesday and Councilman Owen Newcomer on Wednesday.

Vinatieri wanted to know about flaring, a proposed condition requiring Matrix's Sycamore Canyon operation to meet Los Angeles County noise standards and potential sulfur-odor problems.

Mike McCaskey, vice president for Matrix, said once a pipeline is complete, flaring should be rare because the gas byproduct from oil drilling will be sent through the pipeline to Southern California Gas Co.

In addition, there is a condition limiting flaring to four hours a day.

McCaskey also said this oil field, as well as the Sycamore Canyon and La Habra Heights wells, do not have hydrogen sulfide.

If it is determined the natural gas can't be controlled, Matrix would be required to obtain a new permit, according to the conditions.

He also said Matrix would meet Los Angeles County standards.

Other council members also had questions.

Councilman Owen Newcomer asked about a proposal to close the Colima Road underpass to recreational users and the purpose of injecting water back underground.

The tunnel originally wasn't open to people, but later the Puente Hills Landfill Native Habitat Preservation

Authority decided to allow them in, said Luis Perez, project manager for Marine Specialty Services, who wrote the environmental impact report.

Perez also said the water that comes up with oil is separated and then sent back to where it came from.

It's much lower than aquifers that are used for drinking water, he said.

Closing the tunnel to humans would make it more likely that animals would use the tunnel, Perez said.

Mayor Cathy Warner asked about the speed limit for oil trucks using the Landfill Road.

Matrix has asked for an increase from 10 mph to 15 mph, saying that will cause less noise because their trucks won't have to use their brakes as much, McCaskey said.