

More hearings on strip mine near Temecula

Public meetings on proposal to be held at convention center

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RIVERSIDE — A mining company's appeal to the Riverside County Board of Supervisors for reconsideration of plans for a strip mine near Temecula will be the subject of hearings scheduled for Jan. 30 and Feb. 6 at the Riverside Convention Center.

The venue was chosen for the daylong meetings because each is expected to be fully attended, with a large number of speakers, county officials said.

The hearings will also be streamed live on the county website, www.countyofriverside.us.

According to the Executive Office, speaker registration forms will be available beginning the week before the meetings and can be downloaded from the Clerk of the Board website: www.rivcocob.com. Those wishing to address the board will need to hand-deliver their speaker cards before or during the hearings.

Signs, backpacks and other large or bulky items will not be permitted in the convention center.

The county Planning Commission voted 4-1 in August to deny permits for Watsonville-based Granite Construction's proposed 414-acre Liberty Quarry project.

The commission affirmed the vote during its Dec. 7 meeting, prompting the company to appeal to the board as a last resort.

Five public hearings were held in 2011 on the proposed quarry, which would lie just north of the boundary separating Riverside and San Diego counties, east of the Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve, adjacent to Interstate 15 and Rainbow Valley Boulevard.

Thousands of people turned out for the hearings, the majority of them speaking against the quarry. The Temecula City Council and the Pechanga Band of Lusieno Indians, whose reservation borders the project zone, opposed it.

A final environmental impact report was issued in March and found that noise, air, traffic and land-use problems arising from the quarry could be mitigated. Planning commission staff recommended that the board vote in favor of it, providing various conditions were met.

Granite Construction sought a 75-year operating window, during which it planned to remove an estimated 5 million tons of construction-grade aggregate — gravel and sand — from hillsides.

Around 100 direct jobs and nearly 200 collateral jobs would be created by the project, according to Granite. Planning commission staff estimated the quarry would add about \$341 million annually to local government coffers.

The aggregate extracted at the mine would provide asphalt and concrete for roads, homes and other infrastructure projects, Granite officials said.

A report attached to the environmental impact report indicated the mine would cut down on how far trucks have

to transport aggregate for projects in northern San Diego County and southwest Riverside County.

Project opponents argued air quality would suffer, water tables would drop and traffic congestion would surge if mining were permitted.