

Newman Ridge Quarry appeal denied by County Supervisors

Matthew Hedger, Amador Ledger-Dispatch, 10-12-12

The Amador County Board of Supervisors has paved the way for the Newman Ridge Quarry Project on the outskirts of Ione to move forward, following a marathon public hearing Tuesday, Oct. 9. Nearly 40 people took to the podium to voice their opinions on the proposed quarry and asphalt/cement processing facility during a public hearing scheduled after a group of Ione Valley residents appealed a prior Planning Commission decision to certify the project's environmental impact study.

Proponent Bill Bunce told supervisors the Newman Ridge project had been in the planning stages for more than five years, and that renewed allegations that its environmental impact study was somehow flawed are false.

“Our view is that the majority, if not all, of the comments that are raised are just simply wrong,” said Bunce. “Contrary to what has been put forth, the final impact report does not identify new, significant impacts that were not already identified in the draft EIR.”

Bunce said concerns that have continued to be voiced about water, air, traffic, noise and pollutant impacts had all been adequately examined and, if warranted, mitigated, including the potential for naturally occurring asbestos to be released during mining operations.

“It's been put forth that there's naturally occurring asbestos in the quarry site,” he said. “This is false.” Bunce added that the site was inspected to state standards and found to be asbestos-free. Bunce also noted his project would be mining from the same rock formation as an existing site, where he said no asbestos has yet been encountered.

“It (NOA) exists in various places in California,” he said. “This just isn't one of them.”

Bunce told supervisors, when operational, the facility will be “a major boost to the local economy,” and would generate “60 full-time jobs and 180 indirect jobs, and these are high-paying jobs.”

Attorney Douglas Carstens, who said he represented the Ione Valley Land, Air and Water Defense Alliance, a local group, led by Colonel Fraser West and his daughter, Sondra West-Moore, urged the board to overturn the planning commission decision and send planners back to recirculate a new environmental impact study.

“We are asking ... that you reject this project as too damaging, insufficiently analyzed and mitigated,” said Carstens. “There are better alternatives available. The benefits are not documented and do not outweigh the costs.”

While a majority of those who spoke during Tuesday's hearing seemed to clearly not want the quarry project to move forward, several others, including Ione resident Jerry Casessi, an outspoken opponent of a nearby proposed casino, who also lobbied against the Buena Vista BioMass Power Plant, said he was in favor of it.

“This is an emotional time for me, because a lot of my friends are opposed to this,” he said, “But I'm working for a fellow that's proposing this project. He didn't ask me to speak, but I think that it's best that I speak, because there have been a whole lot of rumors going around — how come you're opposing this and didn't oppose that one?”

Cassessi said, during his tenure on the planning commission, he cast votes approving a rock-crushing facility across the street from his own house.

“I didn’t want it there, I hear the noise all the time,” Casessi said. “I see the dust, I see the truck traffic. I didn’t want it there, but minerals are where you find them. It’s just tough for me, because I know these people that are opposed to it.”

After much public input, the board, in two separate actions, voted to deny the IVLAWDA appeal and uphold the Planning Commission’s certification of the project EIR and its issuance of a use permit, which also contains zoning and height variances.

Supervisors also agreed to a request by Newman Minerals, LLC, for a general plan amendment and a zone change, to allow operations to commence on the site.

Both votes were 4-0, with Supervisor Brian Oneto absent from the proceedings.

A full recording of the entire meeting can be obtained by calling the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors, at 223-6470.

The Amador County Board of Supervisors is scheduled to meet again in regular session Oct. 23.