

# Showdown on Syar quarry expansion planned for October

**Barry Eberling, Napa Valley Register, 9-5-15**

Napa County planning commissioners could begin their debate in earnest over the controversial, proposed Syar quarry expansion on Oct. 21.

The day can't come too soon for Syar Industries. A company representative at Wednesday's Planning Commission meeting noted the commission has held 10 public hearings on the topic since 2008, with five coming this year alone.

"We just think it's time to take this to a conclusion," attorney Thomas Adams said on behalf of Syar.

Commissioners have devoted most of the recent Syar sessions to hearing comments from the public and environmental consultants. Syar wants to expand its 497-acre quarry near Napa State Hospital by 110 acres.

County efforts to gather public comments have gone well beyond what state environmental law envisions, Adams said. The review period for the draft environmental impact report ended in December 2013, yet the county is still receiving comments and responding to them.

"Quite frustrating," he said.

But some residents don't blame a Syar decision delay on citizens continuing to present information.

Resident Susanne von Rosenberg said project consultants spent much of the past six years working on the environmental impact report. In addition, the consultant's responses to public comments on the draft report were disappointing.

"That's why the process is dragging out," she told commissioners. "The job wasn't done right in the first place."

The Syar expansion proposal has prompted an avalanche of public comments. Some people say the larger quarry will bring more noise and dust to adjacent Skyline Wilderness Park and nearby neighborhoods.

Others say the expansion can be done safely and will have little effect on Skyline or neighborhoods, a view mirrored in the environmental impact report. They say the county needs the aggregate that Syar provides for roads and development.

Although commissioners didn't debate the Syar quarry request on Wednesday, they did ask a few questions about it.

Commission Chairwoman Heather Phillips asked about a proposed, annual compliance report Syar would file. The report is to show that Syar is following county rules related to air quality, noise control, creek protection, reclaiming mined areas and other issues.

Some of the information in the annual compliance reports would come from consultants, some from Syar self-reporting, Adams said.

But Phillips said having an outsider do the reporting would make people feel more comfortable.

"I think it becomes rather cumbersome and costly to have third parties on site on a weekly basis," Adams

said. "I think it's something that has to be thought through, as far as what's feasible. But I don't think we have any objection to confirmation that the data we provide is accurate."

Syar provides data to agencies all the time, Adams said. Most environmental laws rely on self-reporting, he added.

Commissioner Matt Pope brought up the fear from some citizens that silica might be present in dust coming from the quarry and drifting into neighborhoods. Crystalline silica can cause scar tissue in lungs. The Syar environmental report addressed the issue and didn't see a health threat.

Still, Pope asked if the county Health and Human Services Agency might check neighborhoods near Syar to gauge health conditions that might be related to an expanded quarry, should the expansion go forward.

County Planner Donald Barrella said that might be possible. In addition, Bay Area Air Quality Management District representatives recently visited the Syar quarry and made recommendations to control dust.

The Syar session on Wednesday lasted for an hour with about 35 people attending. That compares to the four-and-a-half hour session on Aug. 12 with about 200 people attending. Planning staff is still trying to answer public comments arising from that meeting.

This latest Syar session simply allowed for some housekeeping and provided a preview of what's to come. The next major step will begin when the commission meets at 1:30 p.m. on Oct. 21.