

Moorpark fights county panel's OK of mine project

Michele Willer-Allred, Ventura County Star, 2-17-16

Concerned over the amount of truck traffic several county-approved projects have allowed into the city, the Moorpark City Council on Wednesday unanimously agreed to appeal a recent Ventura County Planning Commission approval of a local mine expansion project.

The commission on Feb. 11 approved a request by Wayne J Sand & Gravel for a conditional-use permit to expand its mining facility adjacent to Grimes Canyon Road.

The permit, effective until 2046, allows the company to increase the excavation area from 48 acres to 134 acres and boost production from 270,000 tons to 700,000 tons per year.

It also allows an average of 240 and a maximum of 300 truck trips per day, up from the current average of 72 to 100 maximum trips per day.

There would be a limit on truck trips during peak hours of traffic, but no restrictions on using state Highway 23.

Wayne J Sand & Gravel is one of several gravel mines on Highway 23 on unincorporated land between Fillmore and Moorpark.

Mining has occurred on portions of the site since 1948, and the current conditional-use permit application was filed in 2003.

The county planning commission added conditions to the permit, including the acceptance of a \$25,000 contribution for soundproofing homes in both Fillmore and Moorpark; contribution to a "fair share traffic fund" to Fillmore; contribution to a Highway 23 freeway bypass in Moorpark; and a requirement that trucks from the mine use the most direct route for deliveries.

Brian Baca, county planning manager, said a revised environmental impact report was circulated and completed last year, and it listed truck traffic as "less than significant."

He said peak-hour trips will not increase under the permit, and that the closure of another mining company already reduced truck traffic in the area.

Baca said cities and counties can't really regulate a state highway unless they can identify a "nuisance or specific safety hazard."

David Bobardt, community development director for Moorpark, said even with the permit conditions, the project avoids "meaningful mitigation on the city of Moorpark."

"It places the burden of the bypass solution entirely on the city, even though the need for the bypass is created by the county's approval of projects with excessive truck traffic impacts," Bobardt said.

He also said almost all the additional truck trips will come through Moorpark and will continue to go 25 feet away from many homes along Walnut Canyon, which were built before 1948.

Moorpark has been working on a plan to create a bypass road to divert gravel trucks away from downtown, but city officials said its been costly and challenging to achieve without county help.

Several family members and residents spoke Wednesday in favor of Moorpark allowing the locally owned mining and gravel business to continue operation. They said the company shouldn't be blamed for the larger issue of trucks coming from elsewhere onto a state highway that runs through Moorpark.

Moorpark City Manager Steve Kueny said the city doesn't want to shut down the business. He said the conditions requested by the planning commission are "unrealistic," including conditions that require the city to condemn county property to build the bypass and make state highway improvements. Kueny said the city will take the appeal to the Ventura County Board of Supervisors.

This isn't the first time the city has fought the county over projects, including a different mining facility expansion, the Simi Valley Landfill expansion, and the Broad Beach replenishment project, which could all bring more truck traffic to Moorpark.

Council members said they have been criticized for trying to protect the city from the impact of too much truck traffic.

"Moorpark has had very little say and very little respect with what we're trying to do in our community," said Councilman Mark Van Dam, who otherwise commended the Wayne J mining company.

Van Dam said the bypass is a "huge issue" that needs to be addressed by the county.

"The only way to get them to look at that is to appeal their EIR," Van Dam said.

Councilman Keith Millhouse said Wayne J Sand & Gravel are also "victims of the county just approving truck trips in Moorpark without mitigating factors, and this is something that we've seen constantly over the course of time."

"It's time that the county realize that we're not just an afterthought in the east county," Millhouse said. "They need to do the EIR correctly not only for this project but for other projects."