

Azusa City Council Meeting: Consultants hired by Duarte critique Vulcan Materials mining proposal

Daniel Tedford, Los Angeles Newspaper Group, 4-20-10

AZUSA -- Experts hired by Duarte on Monday methodically tried to discredit planning and environmental documents regarding a proposal to mine 80 acres in the San Gabriel Mountains.

The Azusa City Council listened to hours of testimony regarding the proposal by Vulcan Materials Co. to move its mining operation to an area west of Fish Canyon near Duarte's border.

The report by Duarte's consultants, A.G.I. Geotechnical, Inc., critiqued aspects of Azusa's consultant's review of the project, saying landslide potential wasn't adequately evaluated and rock reserves estimated on the east side of Vulcan's property are half as much as estimated, according to the report.

The mine would close much faster if mining operations were to remain on the east, which is already permitted, opponents of the mining proposal said.

"It proves it is not an equal swap," said Duarte City Manager Darrell George. "The mining will play out when they run out of rock. They run out and are done."

Vulcan Materials has a permit to mine 190 acres near Fish Canyon. The company wants to exchange 80 acres of land on its eastern property line for the ability to mine 80 undisturbed acres near its western property line.

The 270-acre Vulcan property is in Azusa but rests near the Duarte border. For Vulcan to move forward, Azusa officials would have to approve Vulcan's plan to mine the undisturbed western 80 acres.

Duarte presented its new report in front of a packed council meeting Monday. The controversial mining proposal has pitted Duarte and Azusa staffs against each other, and many Duarte residents have turned out against the proposal.

Azusa city officials questioned the timing of Duarte's report and rejected its claims.

"They sprung it on us last minute, when they clearly had adequate time. I think the timing was not by accident," Azusa City Manager Fran Delach said. "It is clear from the calculation I have seen, it is an 80 acres for 80 acres. If (Duarte's report) is true, I don't know why any of the consultants previously would have missed that or brought an issue to it."

During the public review of an environmental report on the project, Azusa's consultant Steve Lilburn said aggregate reserves on each side of the property were nearly equal, if not a little more on the east side.

But the new report contradicts Lilburn's findings.

"The study shows what we have been claiming all along - that the swap isn't really a swap, but an expansion of mining," said Richard Deem, a member of anti-mining group Save Our Canyon.

Save Our Canyon has questioned the amount of aggregate on the east side for months, and urged Duarte officials to commission a report on the rock available at Vulcan's site, Deem said.

"Vulcan stands to gain 45 million tons of extra rock under the revised plan," Deem said. "The implications for the environmental impact report are most troubling, since (it) assumes that mining of aggregate is equal under the two plans."

The South Coast Air Quality Management District also presented new comments on the proposal to the council Monday. Recently, the agency had a town hall meeting in Duarte revealing new analysis on the project at the request of Duarte officials. The new material, which used data that doesn't meet EPA guidelines for such analysis, revealed a higher risk, but no air quality thresholds were broken, officials said.

Azusa officials support AQMD's idea of installing a permanent monitoring station at a school in Duarte, but the agency's new comments won't have a significant impact, Delach said.

"I think that their initial report was less biased and more valid and I think when they went outside the EPA's guidelines is when I think they are running afoul with the intent of what they are supposed to be doing," Delach said.