

City of Hope doesn't see the benefit in new Azusa Rock Quarry mining proposal

Daniel Tedford, Los Angeles Newspaper Group, 4-23-10

A high-ranking City of Hope official wrote in a letter last week that an Azusa Rock Quarry mining proposal wasn't clearly defined and offered no benefit compared to the existing plan.

Days before Vulcan Materials Co.'s new mining proposal went before the Azusa City Council on Monday, Richard Thompson sent his letter to Azusa staff outlining his concerns. Thompson is vice president of facilities, design and construction at City of Hope, which is about three miles from Vulcan's mining operation.

Thompson also requested that City of Hope be used as a potential site for air quality monitoring to gauge the impacts of any mining operation.

"We are concerned with several aspects of the proposed project as it relates to air quality and aesthetic impacts," wrote Thompson.

Because he is in charge of environmental issues regarding the hospital, Thompson was the best person to comment on the project, City of Hope officials said.

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.

Vulcan officials said they disagreed with Thompson's critiques, but welcomed additional air quality monitoring.

"Their suggestion of placing an additional air monitoring device on their facility should be reviewed," Vulcan spokesman Todd Priest said. "However, we are confident in the two analyses that have been done by the South Coast Air Quality Management District, which indicate our new plan meets all state and federal clean air guidelines. The new plan for Azusa Rock will dramatically reduce the production limits allowable, which would translate into air emission savings."

Azusa officials did not return messages seeking comment.

Thompson's letter had five points of critique, mostly dealing with the EIR and the affect mining will have on the view of the San Gabriel Mountains.

Thompson wrote that dust and emissions can be dangerous and the project potentially impacts air quality, but didn't say the project would increase danger to patients. In fact, it says that impacts to air quality "under both the proposed project and alternatives would be less than significant after mitigation."

Thompson's letter lends credence to some of Duarte officials' views on flaws in the EIR and the project itself, Duarte Councilman John Fasana said.

"I think it does ... signify there is a recognition for some of the issues the city of Duarte has raised," Fasana said.

In e-mails and other contact earlier this year, Duarte officials had asked the City of Hope to weigh in on the project, specifically about the potential for negative air quality impacts.

While Thompson's comments were pertinent and important, Fasana wasn't surprised they didn't deal more with medical issues.

"We still don't really know" the affect the project will have on air quality, Fasana said.

More study is needed to establish the affects, Fasana said, something he was happy the City of Hope encouraged by offering itself as a place the ACMD could conduct more monitoring.