

Mining proposal puts Azusa, Duarte residents at odds

Daniel Tedford, Los Angeles Newspaper Group, 2-4-10

AZUSA -- A company's proposal to shift mining operations along the Azusa-Duarte border may carve a divide between the neighboring cities.

A boisterous crowd of mostly Duarte residents spoke out against the plan by Vulcan Materials Co. at a public hearing Wednesday, often booing Azusa residents who took to the mic in support of the plan.

"The way this project has been pitched is to pit one city against another," said Duarte Councilman John Fasana. "The city of Duarte will fight vigorously to protect it."

More than 150 people attended the second public hearing for comment on an environmental report regarding Vulcan's mining application at Azusa City Hall.

Vulcan has a permit to mine 190 acres near Fish Canyon, although it owns a 270-acre property. The company wants to exchange the ability to mine 80 acres of land on its eastern property line in Azusa for permission to mine 80 acres near its western property line, along the border of Duarte.

For Vulcan to move forward, Azusa officials would have to approve the plan to mine the western 80 acres.

As added incentive, Vulcan has included a new technique in its plan that would contour the hills to look more natural.

The environmental report listed the view, or aesthetics, to Duarte as the only significant impact of the proposal.

At the meeting Wednesday, the Azusa Police Officers' Association expressed its support for the new proposal.

"Azusa Rock has always been a part of this community," said Peter Hoh, a spokesman for the association. "We believe the hillside in Azusa will look better with this plan."

But many Duarte residents who live near Fish Canyon complained their home values, health and aesthetics would be negatively impacted by the proposal.

A number of Duarte residents, including Mayor Margaret Finlay, also threatened to boycott businesses in Azusa if the mining proposal is passed.

"This truly is a case of David and Goliath," said Finlay. "Azusa, don't you be fooled that this is a good deal for you. You think Vulcan cares about you? No."

Not all Azusa residents are in favor of the new proposal, though.

"Some of the attitudes reflected here do not reflect all of those in Azusa," said Richard Deem, spokesman for Save Our Canyon, an anti-mining group in Azusa.

Deem called the acreage swap unfair, claiming the western border represented a bigger benefit to Vulcan because there is more aggregate to be tapped and a small portion of the eastern border has been mined.

The time frame for public comment on the report was recently extended to Feb. 20. The Planning Commission will make a decision on the report and project following the end of public comment. The application will then go to the City Council.