



RIVERSIDE COUNTY: Quarry rush?

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Procedural shortcuts are the wrong way to handle a contentious public issue. Riverside County supervisors should reject a proposal to fast-track revised plans for a quarry near Temecula. The project calls for scrupulous public review, not convenient haste.

Riverside County supervisors today plan to discuss amending county ordinances to help speed up the approval process for a newly redesigned quarry proposal at the same location. Granite Construction Company last week resubmitted plans for Liberty Quarry, an open-pit mine proposed for a 414-acre site west of Interstate 15, just north of the San Diego County line. Granite asked the county to fast-track the new plans, which would allow the project to skirt Planning Commission hearings and go directly to the supervisors for approval. County supervisors tentatively rejected an earlier version of the quarry proposal in February, and made that decision final in May. The quarry would produce aggregate, a type of rock used in construction materials such as cement and asphalt.

The latest proposal envisions a smaller open pit mine that would only dig down about 700 feet instead of more than 1,000. The new quarry would generate 640 truck trips a day, down from 800 in the earlier version. And the mine would operate at the site for 50 years, instead of 75. The proposal also includes a new fee on the quarry's products that Granite says would generate an average of \$1.8 million a year in revenue for the county.

But supervisors should reject any thought of speedy processing for this proposal. Fast-tracking the quarry plans would inevitably look like a political end run around thorough review of the issues, or an attempt to restrict public input and bypass opposition to the quarry. Taking that approach on one of the most bitterly contested projects in the county's history would only undermine public confidence in the county's planning process and the supervisors' impartiality.

Besides, county supervisors' denial of the quarry application hardly put the issues surrounding the plan to rest, particularly given the board's muddled stance: Supervisors in May formally

rejected the project because the negative effects on the surrounding area outweighed the project's benefits — yet approved the environmental report on the quarry, which said just the opposite.

Nor does a scaled-down version of the mine automatically resolve public concerns about the quarry. The proposed location is still a hilltop site surrounded by a tribal reservation, an ecological preserve and a city of more than 101,000 people. A smaller quarry does not end worries about traffic, air pollution, noise and other negative effects from the mine. And the project would still mainly serve San Diego needs, with two-thirds of the materials from the quarry going south of the county line.

A fair decision on the quarry plan requires careful review, not impetuous speed. The county should be seeking a decision that can successfully withstand public scrutiny, not a choice that requires the least amount of time and effort.

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