



RIVERSIDE COUNTY: Quarry changes OK'd

BY JEFF HORSEMAN STAFF WRITER Published: September 25, 2012; 03:06 PM

A revived plan to build an open-pit quarry just south of Temecula got a boost Tuesday, Sept. 25, after Riverside County supervisors added surface mines to the list of projects eligible for a streamlined planning review and vote.

Over the impassioned objections of Liberty Quarry opponents, including Temecula's supervisor, the Board of Supervisors voted 3-2 to extend fast-track eligibility to surface mines, large-scale wind farms and solar projects. Supervisors Marion Ashley, John Benoit and John Tavaglione voted yes, and Bob Buster and Jeff Stone were opposed.

Fast-tracking allows qualified projects to skip the county Planning Commission and head straight to supervisors for approval. Proponents say fast-tracking spurs economic development. Quarry developer Granite Construction could apply for fast-track consideration later this year and a vote is possible before 2013.

In May, supervisors voted down the original quarry plan, but they certified the project's environmental impact report. In July, Granite filed a new application for a quarry on a 414-acre site between Temecula and San Diego County, while quarry backer Benoit proposed extending fast-tracking to mines.

The quarry would use explosive blasts to extract aggregate, or tiny rocks used in construction. Temecula's City Council, the Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians and other opponents say the quarry would pollute the air, destroy the area's quality of life and obliterate a sacred tribal site.

Granite says opponents' fears are baseless and contends the quarry would improve air quality by taking diesel-belching aggregate trucks off the road. The quarry would generate millions in tax revenue while supporting high-quality jobs, supporters argue. Some Inland chambers of commerce and construction trade unions are among the quarry's backers.

Tuesday's vote came after a nearly four-hour public hearing in which 40 to 50 people signed up to speak.

While the quarry itself wasn't up for a vote, it dominated the fast-track discussion. As in previous quarry hearings, supporters wore green shirts and hats, and opponents dressed in orange.

Wearing green, Eddie Rivera of Corona said the quarry would provide good-paying jobs for his friends and family. "I certainly hope you all consider the working people out there," he said. "We need this."

Granite executive Gary Johnson spoke briefly and indicated his company supported the fast-track changes.

Orange-shirted Robbie Adkins told the board that if it supported fast-tracking, opponents would explore how to take Temecula out of Riverside County so it could join San Diego County. "That's how upset we are," she said.

Temecula and Pechanga officials tried to convince the board that the fast-track changes were illegal and improper. The new quarry plan deserves a more thorough review than fast-tracking can provide, they said

Dismissing the quarry job-creation argument, Temecula Councilman Mike Naggar touted his city as a well-run economic powerhouse whose wishes should be respected when it comes to the quarry.

"We do know what we are doing," he said. "Please listen to us."

Stone, who represents Temecula, once again urged his colleagues to honor what he said is the time-honored tradition of supervisors respecting each other's opinion when it came to land-use matters in their districts. Benoit countered that his district would benefit from the reduced air pollution and cheaper aggregate.

Stone tried to tack on an amendment that would give supervisors the exclusive right to propose fast-tracking for projects in their districts. "(It) would go a long way to showing the public we are truly a democratic Board of Supervisors and we are truly transparent and there truly are no ulterior motives to this agenda item," Stone said.

Ashley said Stone's idea could be abused by supervisors seeking to hold a project hostage. "These are not kingdoms and we're not kings," Ashley said.

Stone's amendment failed 3-2 with Buster and Stone in the minority.

Buster questioned why Granite didn't seek fast-tracking with the first quarry plan. The fast-track effort, he said, appears geared toward getting a quarry vote before Tavaglione, a Republican candidate for Congress, potentially wins election in November and leaves the board.

Stone agreed. "This is nothing more than a get-out-of-jail-free card for your friends at Granite Construction to get to the board, just like Supervisor Buster said, in a timely way," he said.

Tavaglione has dismissed such talk. He supported the fast-track changes and asked for solar projects to be included because, he said, "This is the worst time we've seen in decades in this county ... if that means fast-tracking every damn project, I support that."

Tavaglione drew the ire of quarry opponents in May by first voting against the project and then voting to certify its environmental study.

Critics accused him of pandering to campaign donors and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee issued a statement Tuesday calling him "two-faced."

After Tuesday's fast-track vote, Mark Takano, Tavaglione's Democratic opponent, issued a statement saying Tavaglione's "actions raise grave questions about who influences his decisions."

Tavaglione, who has taken campaign money from both sides in the quarry dispute, denied that politics played a role in his quarry votes.

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