

Proposed asphalt plant to bypass extra review

By Nick Baptista, The Valley Springs News, Friday February 12, 2016

Plans to place a hot asphalt plant at the Hogan Quarry cleared another hurdle after a lengthy and oftentimes contentious hearing Tuesday before the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors.

After approximately five hours of testimony and remarks by nearly 30 people, the board voted 3-2 upholding a Dec. 17 Planning Commission decision at the quarry would not have a significant impact on the environment and there was no need to go through a conditional use permit process.

The Planning Commission's decision proved controversial because it was contrary to findings made by the county's health officer, Dr. Dean Kelaita, and Jason Boetzer, county Environmental Health Agency administrator.

Supervisors Cliff Edson, Steve Kearney and Mike Oliveira voted to deny a half-dozen appeals filed against the Planning Commission decision, while Debbie Ponte and Chris Wright voted in favor.

The deciding vote came down to Edson, the board chairman, and he received instant feedback from one of the asphalt plant's opponents.

"Good luck getting re-elected," Janice Bassett said as she left the boardroom.

"That's fine," Edson replied, as Bassett said she would work very hard to see he's not re-elected to a second term in office.

The asphalt plant hearing began in the mid-morning and attracted an overflow audience with a sound system set up in the outer foyer so another 30 or so people could hear the proceedings. The board broke for lunch and the audience dwindled as the hearing continued until the mid afternoon.

While Tuesday's board decision sidesteps the necessity of a possibly lengthy and costly environmental review as part of the conditional use permit process, an environmental review in regards to air quality remains.

Ponte supported the project going through the conditional use permit process so all of the questions and "misinformation" raised so far could be adequately addressed.

"I firmly believe these people (Ford Construction and CB Asphalt) are doing the right thing," said Oliveira, citing his personal experience in the construction business. The two firms are subject to more than a dozen other regulatory agencies and he did not see any significant issues to make them go through the conditional use process.

Kearney defended an earlier email to staff calling attention to Ford Construction and CB Asphalt's project. Kearney said he has remained out of the matter since then and their donation to his 2014 campaign had not influenced him. He said he probably had more donors who were on the other side of this issue.

Kearney also said he discounted the argument the asphalt plant would decrease home values in the neighborhood citing a similar plant near a residential area in Elk Grove where property values continue to increase.

The project still has to go through an Authority to Construct Review and will be responsible to nearly a dozen and a half state and federal agencies, Kearney said.

"This is what a CUP (conditional use permit) is designed for," Wright said in stating why he would vote against a motion to deny the appeals.