

Asphalt plant receives favorable vote from planning panel

By Nick Baptista, The Valley Springs News, Wednesday December 16, 2015

A majority of the Calaveras County Planning Commission went against a staff recommendation and declared its intent to grant an appeal that would clear the way to place an asphalt hot plant at the Hogan Quarry without going through a conditional use permit process.

The action was taken Thursday after a lengthy hearing where those for and against the plant voiced their opinions. The vote was 4 – 1 with Commissioners Ted Allured, Lisa Muetterties, David Tunno and Kelly Wooster voting in favor and Fawn McLaughlin voting against.

The item will return to planning panel on Thursday for formal approval. That meeting begins at 9 a.m. in the Board of Supervisors Chambers, 891 Mountain Ranch Road, San Andreas.

Commissioner Tunno cited reports from experts hired by the county and the applicants, Ford Construction and CB Asphalt, that the asphalt plant did not impose a significant risk to humans, in making his decision.

However, those reports were narrowly focused on human health risks and did not take into consideration other potential impacts to the environment, said Jason Boetzer, the county Environmental Management Agency director, during his presentation to the planning panel on the staff recommendation to deny the appeal.

“There are so many unknowns that you need a CUP (conditional use permit) process to pin them down,” said Lew Mayhew of Burson.

Joyce Techel from MyValleySprings.com said as recently as this September there was a hot plant fire in southern California that posed a health risk to the community and added the Clements plant had an explosion several years ago that sent debris “as big as cars in the air.”

Peter Racz of Rancho Calaveras said he was tired of hearing people trying to scare everybody about the plant and thought it would be beneficial to the local economy and tax base.

Several young men addressed the planning commission in favor of the proposal and the jobs the plant would create.

Silver Rapids Road resident Judy Morgan said she was very concerned with the projected increase in truck traffic and hoped the commission would make a decision based on safety and concern for people who live in the area.

“We’re fighting to protect our health and well-being,” said Janice Bassett, a nearby resident and opponent to the asphalt plant.

In announcing his decision to back the applicants, Tunno was certain it would not be lasting and the matter would go to the county Board of Supervisors on appeal.

“It’s time for us to kick this upstairs,” he said.